THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLAUSE TYPE AND INFORMATION TYPE IN ENGLISH ORAL NARRATIVES

BY

SANDRA L. BELLAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

IN

PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1989

National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-52806-0

Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: Sandra L. Bellan

TITLE OF THESIS: The Relationship Between Clause Type and Information Type in English Oral Narratives

DEGREE: M. Sc.

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1989

Permission is hereby granted to the UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

SBellan

(Student's signature)
#7 - 10556 - 80 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6E 1V3
(Student's permanent address)

Date: April 26/89

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLAUSE TYPE AND INFORMATION TYPE IN ENGLISH ORAL NARRATIVES, submitted by Sandra L. Bellan in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Psycholinguistics.

Matthew S. Dryer
supervisor

Date: October 14, 1988

Abstract

This study investigated the general claim that certain functional notions are marked by particular grammatical devices. In the relevant literature, it has been suggested that morphosyntactic markers such as clause type, voice, and aspectual indicators co-occur with the functional notions of *relative importance* and *on/off the event line*. In this research, the umbrella term *information type* was used to subsume these two notions. Specifically, this study investigated one of the most pervasive claims in the literature – that is, that clause type correlates with information type. From this general claim, three separate hypotheses were tested: First, that independent clauses correlate with more important information, and dependent clauses with less important information; second, that independent clauses correlate with information on the event line of a narrative, while dependent clauses correlate with information off this line; and finally, that the proportion of independent clauses denoting important events on the event line is greater than the proportion of dependent clauses denoting important events on the event line.

Fifteen subjects watched a 5 minute and 56 second film that had musical accompaniment, but no dialogue. They subsequently described the film to a confederate, with the assumption that this individual knew nothing about the content of the film. Each subject then completed a judgement sheet, on which all the items in the film were assigned an importance rating based on how important the subject viewed the particular item to be. The scale used was self-anchored ranging from 1 - 5, where 5 corresponded to *very important* and 1 to *unimportant*.

Two procedures were performed on each subject's transcript. First, independent and dependent predicates were matched with items on the importance judgement sheet so that all eligible predicates received an importance rating. Second, independent and dependent predicates were examined to discover whether they fell on or off the event line of each narrative.

The results revealed that while relative importance may correlate with clause type, the notion of *on/off the event line* does not. Moreover, there was no evidence to support the hypothesis that clause type correlated with the combination of relative importance and the notion of *on/off the event line*. This suggests that the more important parts of narratives may be placed in independent clauses, perhaps so that listeners or readers may pay special attention to this information.

Acknowledgements

Many people contributed to the eventual completion of this thesis – some directly and some indirectly. I would like to thank them all.

It has been a privilege to work with my supervisor, Dr. Matthew Dryer. Without his input, this research would never have taken the shape that it did. First of all, I would like to thank him for reading draft upon draft of certain chapters of this thesis. His ability to cut through to the heart of issues potentially saved me hours that could have been spent exploring blind alleys. His interest in the project was genuine, and this knowledge kept me going through the bad times that seem to be endemic to the life history of a thesis. Most of all, I thank him for this toughmindedness. Finally, his teaching has greatly influenced me during my time spent here. In short, he has been an inspiration both as a supervisor and as a professor.

Thanks also to the members of my committee – to Dr. Nearey for his careful reading of the final draft of this thesis and for his insightful comments. I am especially grateful for his help with the statistical analysis. Thanks also to Dr. Kyril Holden, particularly for sharing his expertise in the field of aspectual systems, and for stepping in to act as my supervisor while Dr. Dryer was on study leave.

Thank you to the subjects without whom this study would not have been possible.

My heartfelt thanks to fellow students who offered not only moral support, but also services, advice, etc. In particular, Tracey Derwing was invaluable – she helped me run subjects, edited chapters of this thesis à la Maureen Dow,

offered advice on everything from where to rent my film, to where to find data analysis programs, and most of all provided endless encouragement and support. Thanks also to Murray Munro for providing an accuracy check by coding some of my data, and for offering advice about formatting of this thesis on the Macintosh at all kinds of unusual hours.

Thanks are due to my friends and family for support. Thanks especially to my Dad for those noon-hour runs that kept me sane during the last few weeks of this project, and to my friend Laila Jensen who has stood by me through thick and thin.

Finally, thanks to my husband Paul who acted simultaneously as editor, sounding board, confidante and morale booster.

Thanks to Charley and Quinn.

Thanks also to the Department of Linguistics for providing financial assistance in the form of research and teaching assistantships.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Preliminaries	1
1.2 Aim of the Study	3
1.3 Overview	5
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 Introduction	6
2.2 Underlying Assumptions	7
2.3 Information Types in Narratives	10
2.4 Field Work on Narratives	16
2.5 The Emergence of a General Theory	27
2.5.1 Major Problems with Studies Investigating Coding of Information Type	38
2.6 Specific Morphosyntactic Markers Coding Information Type	40
2.7 Tomlin's Work	48
2.8 Current Studies	52
2.9 Motivation for the Present Study	53
2.9.1 Requirements for Testing for Correlations between Morphosyntactic Markers and Information Type	54

3. THE EXPERIMENT 56
3.1 Introduction 56
3.2 Subjects 56
3.3 Materials 57
3.4 Procedure 60
3.5 Scoring 61
3.5.1 Identification of Clauses 61
3.5.2 Identification of Dependent Predicates 62
3.5.3 Identification of Predicates on the Event Line 62
3.5.4. The Matching of Clause Type and Relative Importance . . 65

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 67
4.1 Introduction 67
4.2 Evaluation of Hypothesis 1 67
4.2.1 Discussion of the Results 72
4.3 Evaluation of Hypothesis 2 74
4.3.1 Discussion of the Results 82
4.4 Evaluation of Hypothesis 3 83
4.4.1 Discussion of the Results 88
4.5 The Success of the Study in meeting previously set out requirements 91

5. CONCLUSIONS 93
5.1 Summary of the Results of the Experiment 93
5.2 Implications for Future Research 94
5.3 Conclusions 96

REFERENCES 97

APPENDIX A – VERBATIM INSTRUCTIONS 104

APPENDIX B – IMPORTANCE JUDGEMENT SHEET 105

APPENDIX C – ORAL NARRATIVES 111

List of Tables

Table	Description	Page
1	Number of Dependent Predicates on and off the Event Line	68
2	Number of Main Predicates on and off the Event Line	69
3	Percentage of Dependent and Main Predicates Contained in Oral Narratives	70
4	Ratios of Dependent and Main Predicates	71
5	t-test on Ratios of Dependent and Main Predicates	72
6	Number of Predicates Rated for Importance in Oral Narratives	75
7	Percentage of Predicates that were Rated for Importance in Oral Narratives	76
8	Percentage of Rated Dependent and Main Predicates in Oral Narratives	77
9	Mean Importance Ratings of Main and Dependent Predicates	78
10	t-test on Means of Main and Dependent Predicates	79
11	Mean Importance of Main and Dependent Predicates – No Middle Rating	81
12	t-test on Means of Main and Dependent Predicates – No Middle Rating	81
13	Number and Percentage of Main Predicates that are Both on Event Line and Important	85
14	Number and Percentage of Dependent Predicates that are Both on Event Line and Important	86
15	Percentages of Important Main Predicates on Event Line and Important Dependent Predicates on Event Line	87

16 t-test on Percentages of Important Main Predicates on Event Line and Important Dependent Predicates on Event Line . 87

17 Breakdown of Raw Data which Comprise the Total Number of Rated Dependent Predicates 89

18 Percentage of Predicates in Oral Narratives Assigned Importance Ratings of Four or Five 90

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preliminaries

> "Chomsky's picture, on the other hand, seems to be something like this: except for having such general purposes as the expression of human thoughts, language doesn't have any essential purpose, or if it does, there is no interesting connection between its purpose and its structure" (Searle, 1974, p.17).

In the above quotation, Searle describes some beliefs that characterize a formalist view of language. However, in recent years, many linguists have moved away from such a position and have adopted a more functional view of language. While formalists believe that language does not have any essential purpose, functionalists believe that it does – communication. Hence, in this view, language is "first and foremost regarded as an instrument of social interaction by means of which human beings can communicate with each other, and thus influence each other's mental and practical activities" (Dik, 1980, p. 1).

Furthermore, formalists hold that there is no interesting connection between language's purpose and its structure. Functionalists insist that there is. In fact, they allege that two particular notions follow from subscribing to a functional view of language. The first is that communicative function can explain linguistic form. The second is that grammatical form is (at least partially) derivable from extragrammatical principles.

These assumptions are important to identify since, whether or not they are explicitly acknowledged, these claims underlie the work of linguists who claim to find connections between certain grammatical mechanisms and particular

functional notions. Specifically, these assumptions characterize the research done on the coding of information type. The investigation of this coding is the topic of this study.

Linguists who believe that information type is coded adhere to a general theory. This theory, in its most strongly stated form claims three things: First of all, that information type in discourse is always systematically separated; secondly, that it correlates with certain morphosyntactic markers with such regularity that the marker can be said to *code* information; and finally, that this coding is universal across languages.

However, the term information type is a general one that subsumes several different notions. The two types of information that are of particular interest in this study are IMPORTANT information and information on the EVENT LINE of narratives. Important information is that which is central to a particular discourse theme, while an event line is that chain of temporally sequenced events, that in describing actual past time actions, furthers the progression of the narrative. Each of these types of information are claimed to be coded by different groups of linguists.

Field work on narratives from a variety of languages first led researchers to believe that there might be a correlation between information type and given morphosyntactic markers. Some of the early studies suggested that important information was overtly marked (Jones & Nellis 1979; Bishop 1979; McArthur 1979; Jones & Coleman 1979), some suggested that an event line was overtly marked (Harries 1965; Grimes & Glock 1970; Salser & Neva 1977; Flik 1978, Longacre & Levinsohn 1978), and a few suggested that important information on an event line was overtly marked (Walrod 1977; Machin 1977; Longacre 1979a). The pervasiveness of these markers led some linguists to posit that such

marking was not restricted to a small number of languages, but rather was a language universal (Jones & Jones1979; Hopper 1979b; Hopper & Thompson 1980).

In particular, three general markers are proposed to code information type in languages throughout the world. These are: clause type (Labov & Waletzky 1967; Townsend & Bever 1977; Talmy1978; Hopper 1979b; Wallace 1982; Tomlin 1985; Thompson 1987; Reinhart in press), voice (Hopper 1979; Hopper & Thompson 1980; Wallace 1982) and aspect (Forsyth 1970; Reid 1977; Hopper 1979; Hopper & Thompson 1980, Wallace 1982; Rafferty 1982; Li, S. Thompson & R. McMillan Thompson 1982; Fox 1983; Waugh & Monville-Burston 1986).

1.2 Aim of the Study

However, while there have been many claims about the alleged coding of information type, there has been little in the way of empirical research. For the most part, studies that have investigated the proposed marking of information type are severely limited by at least three problems. First of all, frequently in these studies, the frequency with which a given morphosyntactic marker co-occured with information type is not indicated. Hence, one is left to speculate about the exact level of the relative frequency. Secondly, in these studies, important information in given narratives is identified by linguists, even though the narratives in question have been produced by other individuals. However, such an approach is fundamentally misguided since it assumes that importance is an objective rather than a subjective notion. That is, it assumes that certain facts or events are inherently important and can thus be easily isolated in a text. However, this is not the case. Facts and events are viewed as being important or not by particular individuals. One individual's view of what

is important may differ radically from another's. Hence, importance is clearly a subjective notion. This leads to the third problem. Since objective criteria for what determines importance cannot be established, decisions regarding which propositions belong to various levels of importance are essentially arbitrary. It seems likely that the linguists in the above-mentioned studies may have fallen into a seductive methodological circle – that is, using structural evidence to identify information levels.

Tomlin (1985) made an effort to cope with these problems by proposing an innovative methodology that would ensure that the functional notion of importance could be identified independently of morphosyntactic forms. This study follows Tomlin's work in that a similar methodology is used to allow independent identification of important information. Furthermore, this study allows for the individual determination of importance. This is an essential criterion, since in order to claim that certain correlations between form and function hold, one must first be certain that the morphosyntactic features in question were in fact seen as important or non-important.

Secondly, though there has been empirical investigation that suggests that the *event line* of narratives may correlate with certain morphosyntactic markers (Thompson 1987), and empirical investigation that suggests that *relative importance* may correlate with certain morphosyntactic markers (Tomlin 1985), no study has tested systematically for correlations with both event line *and* relative importance.

In short, this is the objective of the study. The particular morphosyntactic marker that will be investigated in this study is clause type. Hence, the present study was designed to test one of the most pervasive claims in the literature –

that clause type correlates with information type. More specifically, the questions to be addressed are: Is there is a correlation between clause type and relative importance; and secondly, is there is a correlation between clause type and information on and off the event line of narratives?

1.3 Overview

Chapter 2 consists primarily of a review of studies that find support for the claim that information type is marked by various morphosyntactic devices. The experiment, and the method used therein is described in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the results of the experiment are presented and discussed. Chapter 5 is a summary of the findings of the main experiment and includes some implications for future research in light of the results.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this literature review, works that support the notion that information type is coded morphosyntactically are discussed. This general theory has three component claims which must be further elucidated: One, that information type in discourse is always distinguished; two, that these types of information correlate with certain morphosyntactic properties, so that it can be said that these properties actually code information type; and finally, that this coding is universal across language. First of all, a brief introduction will be provided in order to give a frame of reference to the theory. Secondly, there will follow an historical overview, the purpose of which will be two-fold: To discuss specific papers that first showed support for this notion, and in so doing, reveal claims about exactly which types of information may be coded in narrative and by what morphosyntactic features. It will become apparent that the general term information type actually subsumes two distinct notions. One type of information that may be coded is that which is central or important to a particular discourse theme. This is termed IMPORTANT information. A second type that may be coded is comprised of temporally sequenced events, that in describing actual past time actions, forms the EVENT LINE of a given narrative. Papers which correspond to one or the other of these two notions will be examined under the appropriate classification. Thirdly, it will be seen that there are specific morphosyntactic devices which allegedly code information type. These include various aspectual markers, such as the perfect, perfective and progressive aspect, certain word order structures, such as subordinate and

participial clauses, and finally the passive voice. Evidence will be provided for each of these claims. Finally, shortcomings of the studies will be discussed, and an approach will be suggested that the author believes must be taken in future research. In the course of this discussion, several issues will arise that must be addressed. Crucial questions will emerge, such as: Why should information type in narratives in particular, and in discourse in general be overtly marked? Are there really correlations to be found between types of information and particular morphosyntactic structures, and if so, is this marking only language specific, or can it be said to be part of a system that affects every language? Finally, even if high correlations are found, we must consider what status a high correlation has with respect to coding. For, even if we can ascertain that marking occurs across language, we must be certain that a language user infers from the marker what meaning is being expressed in order to claim that coding effects exist.

2.2 Underlying Assumptions

Assuming that different types of information in narrative are indeed overtly marked, why, according to proponents of this theory, should such a phenomenon occur? That is, why would a speaker or writer feel the need to mark the distinction between information types? According to advocates of this theory, the reason this is done is to draw the hearer or reader's attention to the special significance of certain information. However, claims about which *types* of information in narrative are overtly marked differ among theorists. As previously indicated, there are two schools of thought on information type in narratives. On the one side, many linguists (Labov & Waletzky 1967; Gleason 1968; Hale 1973; Grimes 1975; Sheffler 1978; Hopper 1979; Longacre 1979a;

Thompson 1987) claim that "it is a universal of narrative discourse that in any extended text, an overt distinction is made between the language of the actual story line and the language of supportive material which does not itself narrate the main events" (Hopper, 1979, p. 282). Hence, material on the event line is separated from all other material in a narrative. The reason that this is done is so that the hearer/reader can pick out parts of the discourse which "are to be stored for immediate sequential processing as opposed to those parts which are to be stored for future or concomitant access" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 282).

On the other side resides a group of linguists (Jones & Jones 1979; Jones & Nellis 1979; Tomlin 1984a; Tomlin 1984b; Tomlin 1985; Longacre 1985) who claim that what is distinguished in narrative is not the event line from the rest of the story, but all important information from all other information. Thus in this instance, morphosyntactic marking would occur to help the hearer/reader identify important information so that s/he could pay special attention to it. Evidently then, whether it is an event line or important information that is distinguished from all other material, what determines the difference between the two kinds of information in each category stems from the communicative function. That is, we choose as speakers or writers to draw attention to the significance of certain information.

Clearly, linguists who make such an assumption must hold a particular view of language. Language would not be regarded as a set of arbitrary structures that could not be influenced by the speaker of the language. Rather, such linguists would believe that language is a tool that we use in order to communicate ideas, and as such can be influenced by that very communication process. In short, these theorists would have a functional view of language. More precisely, this is

a view in which a "language is first and foremost regarded as an instrument of social interaction by means of which human beings can communicate with each other, and thus influence each other's mental and practical activities" (Dik, 1980, p. 1). It is important to clarify the notions that follow from subscribing to a functional view of language, since all theorists who believe that information type is distinguished and systematically marked share this functional view. In particular, there are two major functional claims that must be elaborated. The first is that language is inseparable from setting. Hence, linguists who adhere to a functional view of language believe that sentences must be studied in the discourse context in which they occur, and not out of context as isolated entities. Certainly, Hopper and Thompson feel that language should be studied from this point of view.

> "A fully coherent theory of language must begin at the level of discourse motivation for individual sentences" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 295).

The second claim is that the primary function of language is communication. Hence, a functionalist believes that the study of language *must* from the outset take place within the framework of language use. S/he believes that though language may indeed be used for thought, or for problem solving or for dreaming, that none of these constitute the main function of language. And *because* this is language's primary function, it directly affects the shape that a given language takes.

This belief leads to two critical assumptions – the first that grammatical form is at least partially derivable from extragrammatical principles. In fact, Tomlin (1985) claims that the goal of functional linguistics is as follows:

> "To describe and explain empirically the connections possible between syntactic form and semantic or pragmatic functions" (Tomlin, 1985, p. 85).

More specifically, the particular extragrammatical principle that is seen to govern linguistic form is communication. Hence, a functionalist believes that communication explains linguistic form, and that because of this, "the structure of language cannot be fruitfully studied, described, understood or explained without reference to the communicative function" (Givon, 1979, xv). In summary then, the principal argument is that communicative function determines the difference between information types.

While the theory assumes that a distinction between information types is marked in discourse in general, the study of information type has traditionally taken place in the discourse genre of narrative. Narratives provide an ideal starting place, because while their general properties are not fundamentally different from the properties of any discourse, they are clearly simpler than other types of discourse; they have well-known structural properties (Propp 1958; Rumelhart 1975; Mandler & Johnson 1977; Stein & Glenn 1982; etc.), easily identifiable participants, and straightforward chronology. In fact, it was through the study of narratives that linguists found evidence for a distinction between different types of information.

2.3 Information Type in Narratives

Narratives have been an object of study for years. Bartlett (1932) was interested in adults' memory for stories and Propp (1958) was interested in certain of their structural properties. However, apart from this early work, not much attention was given to narratives until the Sixties. At this time, Labov and

Waletzky (1967) focused on another aspect of narrative -- the information types involved therein. From what can be gleaned from the literature, it seems that they were among the first linguists to identify information levels in narrative. In a narrative analysis of oral data, they identified two levels of information. The first of these was a narrative clause. Elements in these clauses were characterized by their temporal sequence, and "their order (could) not be changed without changing the inferred sequence of events in the original semantic interpretation" (Labov & Waletzky, 1967, p.22). Furthermore, if all of these clauses were combined, we would have what Labov and Waletzky classify as a narrative. They define narrative as:

> "One method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred" (Labov & Waletzky, 1967, p. 20).

The second clause type was called a free clause. These clauses were characterized by their ability to range freely through the narrative, and by the fact that they had no fixed relation to temporal sequence. In other words, narrative clauses form the EVENT LINE of the narrative, and free clauses are OFF this line.

However, this label of event line is not the only one encountered in the relevant literature. Clauses that narrate actions are said to form the "thread of the narrative," the "narrative sequence," the "predication line," the "backbone," and the "foreground" of given narratives.

Grimes (1968) also made some observations about information type in narratives. Furthermore, he made the same observation regarding temporal order that Labov and Waletzky did -- namely that there were some clauses which seemed able to appear anywhere in the discourse without violating its original

sense. Grimes claims that "these clauses (were) likely to be part of the background of the discourse as a whole" (Grimes, 1968, p. 29). The other type of clause could not be moved without giving a different sense to the discourse. Clauses such as these were seen "to belong to the main thread of the discourse" (Grimes, 1968, p. 29).

Gleason (1968) was another pioneer in exploiting the difference between events and non-events. In his paper exploring various features of narratives, he noted that events in a narrative were ordered in a sequence which reflected the natural order of occurrence. Gleason refers to this chain of events both as the backbone of the narrative (p. 41), and as the event line.

> "We will call such a chain of actions joined by appropriate connections in the way required by the tactics of the language an event line" (Gleason, 1968, p. 48)

The next three papers to be discussed also draw the distinction between clauses which narrate events and those that do not. However, each of these studies expands upon the *characteristics* of the clauses that typify the two information levels. While previous papers showed that there were clauses both on and off the event line, these papers go one step further by providing characterizations of what types of information tend to be reported off the event line.

Hale (1973) is the first of these papers. In analyzing various Nepal languages, he discovered the presence of "clauses which refer to actual overt events in past time" (Hale, 1973, p.13). However, he also pointed out that it would be unusual to find a narrative which consisted only of backbone material. The clauses which do not form part of the chain of events that constitute the backbone have

important functions. They may "describe the setting, introduce the participants, inject editorial comments and relate various backstage developments" (Hale, 1973, p. 30).

Grimes (1975) labels information on the event line backbone, and calls all other information background. He offers a detailed discussion of exactly which types of information may comprise the background of a narrative. Background information may contain a setting, evaluations and collateral information. A prototypical narrative begins with a setting. This component may provide information about the main character of characters, and the time and location of the story. Secondly, in a given story, the narrator tends to relate not only the events of the narrative, but also how s/he feels about them. According to Grimes, these evaluations function to bring the hearer more closely into the story. Finally, collateral information conveys what did *not* happen in a particular discourse. It relates the non-events of a story to a given event, and in so doing, "it heightens the significance of the real events" (Grimes, 1975, p.65). Grimes cites an example from the Saramaccan language to provide evidence for this claim.

> "The canoe overturned. The father did not die. The mother did not die. The children did not die. Instead, they all escaped to land" (Grimes, 1975, p. 64)

In the above example, only sentences 1 and 5 are on the event line. It is clear however, that the interruption of these two events by three irrealis clauses serves to underscore the importance of the fact that the family lived.

Finally, Sheffler (1978) also found evidence for a fundamental distinction between two kinds of information in discourse. In particular, she discovered that in the Munduruku language, all parts of a discourse could be divided into

two types of content – primary and secondary. Primary content was seen to be that which was on the event line of the narrative. Conversely, secondary content consisted of all material that was not part of that line. More specifically, the information that typified secondary content was divided into four categories. Sheffler claimed that secondary content consisted of "comment, parentheses, flashbacks and summaries" (Sheffler, 1978, p. 128). Comments are essentially a specialized description, referring only to participants in the narrative. They described the "overall physical condition, position, existence or emotional state of participants" (Sheffler, 1978, p. 128). Parentheses served to comment not on participants, but on the manner in which a primary action was carried out, and the setting in which this action may have occurred. Flashbacks explained the content of a previous episode by having it described by a character other than the main actor of the discourse. Finally, summaries "optionally (closed) chapters, episodes, or paragraphs in a causal or a contrastive closure" (Sheffler, 1978, p. 132). These are distinct from comments and parentheses in that they are causal or contrastive in nature, not descriptive.

Clearly, the above breakdown is peculiar to Munduruku. However, even though there may be some non-event material that is language specific, in general, it seems that *two* notions characterize most narratives. First of all, as both Hale and Grimes noted, there will be some *description* in a narrative. This description may pertain to characters or to setting. Secondly, because narratives are told by people, who have points of view, *comments* are likely to be found interspersed through the text. These are evaluations or opinions of certain characters or situations given by the narrator.

In summary then, it is clear that an event line can be singled out from all

other material in a narrative. However, at this point, one might, with good reason, wonder about the value of classifying parts of a narrative. What could possibly be the point of arbitrarily categorizing these aspects? As Longacre and Levinsohn (1977) suggest, this breakdown "is not merely a classification to be indulged in to humour our taxonomic propensities, but many languages have specific ways to indicate backbone from non-backbone" (Longacre & Levinsohn, 1978, p. 107). Hence, what is crucial is not *just* that information can be systematically separated, but that languages have morphological and syntactic devices for reflecting this distinction. That is, this distinction is grammaticized.

Up to this point, only papers that claim that there is a distinction between language of the story line and language of supportive material have been discussed. The pioneers of narrative analysis thought this to be the crucial distinction. Yet, there are papers belonging to an entirely different school of thought. In these studies, it is claimed that the fundamental distinction is not between information on the event line and information off it, but between *important* information in the narrative, and all *other* information. What unifies these opposing views is the *general* belief that information type is marked. Hence, we see that a general theory emerges, proponents of which believe three things: First of all that information type in discourse is always distinguished; secondly, that these types of information correlate with certain morphosyntactic properties, so that it can be said that these properties actually code information type; and finally, that this coding is universal across language.

Before discussing some claims in depth, it is important to look at some early studies that first led researchers to believe that there might be a correlation

between linguistic form and information level.

2.4 Field Work on Narratives

Traditionally, investigating a new language consisted of deciphering the grammar of that language – describing the syntax, morphology and phonology. However, there were often cases in which certain grammatical devices defied simple lexical glosses. Linguists began to believe that these sorts of mysteries were inevitable as long as the languages were studied in isolation – without reference to the discourse context in which they occurred. Once a few researchers began to study languages from a functional perspective, it was discovered that the roles of many previously undefinable markers became clear. In short, linguists noticed that many functional notions were overtly marked. In particular, there is evidence that certain grammatical devices code notions such as authorial viewpoint, thematic participant and not surprisingly, information type.

Longacre and Levinsohn (1978) note examples from two languages in which authorial viewpoint is overtly marked. In the Inga language, authorial viewpoint is claimed to affect the reference system of a narrative. In a narrative containing several third person characters, an author may associate himself with any of these. Hence, "this may figure in the overt structure of a text in terms of the way in which such participants are referred to pronominally and deictically" (Longacre & Levinsohn, 1978, p. 106). Secondly, in Oksapmin, authorial viewpoint is marked by specialized morphology on the verb.

Tracy and Levinsohn (1977) find evidence for the marking of thematic participant. In studying narratives from the Ica language, they had great

difficulty discerning subject from object in given clauses. However, when they included paragraph structure as part of the analysis, it became possible to identify the subjects of the clauses. It seems that in Ica, all paragraphs have a thematic participant that is identified in the first few sentences of a paragraph. This participant is marked by the suffix *-ri*. Moreover, "he is assumed to be the subject of all clauses in the paragraph unless something is marked to the contrary" (Longacre, 1979b, p. 120).

Finally, there are studies that seem to suggest that some languages code information type. However, as pointed out earlier, information type is a general term which subsumes the two notions of *importance* and *on the event line*. Hence, we will see that in the studies to be presented, some linguists claim that importance is coded, some claim that event line is coded, and a few claim that both of these notions are. Therefore, upcoming papers will be examined under their appropriate classification. The first six papers provide evidence for the claim that an event line in some narratives is coded. The next four papers support the notion that important information is coded. Finally, the last two papers show how both notions may be coded.

Harries (1965) noted that in Swahili, the usual past tense marker was the prefix *-li*, indicated on the verb. However, when several verbs denoting chronological events occurred together, only the *first* verb received the tense prefix. All other verbs in the sequence were marked with the prefix *-ka*. This is referred to as the consecutive tense prefix. Apparently, since this marker is restricted to narrating consecutive events, this prefix functions to track the story line.

In a study of a written Saramaccan travel narrative, Grimes and Glock (1970) discovered that the main thread of the narrative (event line) was often set

off by grammatical means. More specifically, *di-* which is a type of determiner in Saramaccan, functioned to highlight background information. Conversely, the adverb *hen* signaled the function of successive event.

Salser (1977) also found evidence for the grammaticization of the event line in narrative. In the Cubeo language, there is a particle that marks mainline events, so that if all clauses marked by this particle are jotted down, an abstract of the whole discourse is obtained.

Similarly, in the Inga language, there is also a marker associated with the notion of temporal sequence. In studying a written narrative from this language, Longacre and Levinsohn (1978) found that the marker *-spa* was a succession marker, "indicating that the subject of the action of the dependent verb and of the following verb is the same" (Longacre & Levinsohn, 1978, p. 120).

In Gagou, an aspectual distinction marks the difference between information on the event line, and that off it. Howard (1978) explains that in Gagou there are two aspects that characterize the verbal system — the remote past completive and the habitual incompletive. In an analysis of written narratives, Howard found that the remote past completive aspect correlated with the event line of the narrative, so that she was led to believe that this aspect actually coded the notion of event line.

> "the narrative thread or event line is carried with certain exceptions by the remote past completive" (Howard, 1978, p. 276).

Conversely, the habitual incompletive was used in information that occurred off the event line.

Finally, tense-aspect distinctions also show the difference between the two extragrammatical notions in Dan. Flik (1978) notes that there are three

relevant tense-aspects in Dan. Of these three, two are crucial in distinguishing event line from non-event line material. The aorist "expresses action or description which is entirely independent of reference to a moment in time and to express past actions whose results do not affect the present" (Flik, 1978, p. 56). In other words, it is used with material off the event line. The second tense-aspect, the bound tense is used with predicates on the event line. According to Flik, the main criterion for a bound tense "is that it (be) part of a sequence of actions in the flow of a narrative where all including the first action have bound tense and carry forward the main event line of the story" (Flik, 1978, p. 57). Finally, the third tense-aspect is also connected with time. The independent tense-aspect functions much like the perfect in English, in that "it is used to state an action which is finished but still has some implications for the present moment" (Flik, 1978, p. 58). It is claimed that its function is to give background to the story.

Hence, it is clear that event line may be coded in the narratives of certain languages. However, as indicated earlier, this is not the only extragrammatical notion that is claimed to be coded — importance is also claimed to be grammaticized by certain morphosyntactic devices. Some early papers that make this claim come from a volume of work on Mesoamerican languages edited by Jones and Jones (1979). Representative works from this collection include studies on Totonac, Aquatec, Kickapoo and Cajonos Zapotec. Additionally, four works cited by Longacre (1985) show how the most important events, or the peak of a narrative, may be marked.

Two Totonac folktales, "Our God" and "The Fisherman" were analyzed by Bishop (1979). She discovered that first of all, a primary distinction was made between events that formed the backbone of the narrative, (which she termed

MAINLINE events), and all other material, (which she called SUPPORTIVE). Each information type was found to have a corresponding tense-aspect marker. Mainline events were marked by the preterite tense, while supportive material was marked by other tense-aspects, but most commonly the imperfect aspect. A discovery of this nature fits the pattern of works discussed earlier, in that event line is systematically separated and accordingly marked. However, Totonac has additional marking features which mark the relative significance of information in the folk tales. In particular, both mainline events and supportive material may be further divided into two sub-categories. Apparently, certain mainline events may be marked by the word *tuncan*. Normally, this item is simply glossed as 'then,' but it also has a discourse function when it occurs with mainline events. In this particular instance, the presence of *tuncan* lets the listener know that these events are more important than regular mainline events. Furthermore, when these events are listed, they provide a summary of the action of the narrative. Similarly, certain supportive material may contain a marker. The suffix *-tza*, which has generally been translated as 'already,' "calls attention to the material thus marked as being especially significant or crucial to the flow of the discourse" (Bishop, 1979, p. 35). Hence, Bishop posits that there are four distinct levels of importance in Totonac narrative: "highlighted main events, or summary; main events; crucial supportive information/events; and (ordinary) supportive material" (Bishop, 1979, p. 35).

McArthur (1979) finds a similar pattern in Aguatec. He proposes that aspect distinguishes information level in several genres, but that it is most fully elaborated in a certain sub-type of narrative. In particular, his analysis is based

on historical narratives, legends and folktales. First of all, a crucial distinction is made between mainline events and background material. Mainline events consist of those that have definitely occurred, and are typified by a strong chronological linkage. More importantly, mainline events are overtly marked by zero-aspect verbs, while background information tends to be marked by various aspects and clause types. It emerges as a sort of elsewhere case. However, as in Totonac, a further breakdown occurs. It seems there is a distinction made between events of primary and secondary interest. This difference is reflected in the type of verb form used. Finally, a special highlighting marker, -tz, can be affixed to both primary and secondary events and background information. McArthur claims that when the affix is added to the events, a backbone or summary is formed. When the affix is added to background information, it simply becomes *crucial* background information. Hence, a five part hierarchy emerges with backbone events at the top and simple background information at the bottom.

Further evidence for the marking of levels of significance comes from Jones and Coleman (1979). In the Algonquian language of Kickapoo, various modes and tenses correlate with certain types of information. Specifically, there are two modes relevant to narrative discourse – the conjunct conjunctive and the independent indicative. The former can take affixes for the first, second and third aorist tense, while the latter employs only the first aorist tense. As these mode-tense combinations relate to information level, the event line of the narrative is marked by the conjunct conjunctive in the second aorist tense. However, further breakdowns based on the relative importance of certain information are also present. Very important or pivotal events are marked either by the independent indictive first aorist tense or the conjunct conjunctive

second aorist tense. Finally, the most important events in a story, or its peak, would be indicated by the independent indictive first aorist tense. At the other end of the spectrum resides information which is labeled background information. However, this general category is also further broken down into three classes: theme statements, descriptions, and de-emphasized events or *significant* descriptions. Again, each has a corresponding grammatical marker. The conjunct conjunctive third aorist tense correlates with theme statements. The conjunct conjunctive first aorist tense correlates with either those events that are routine or predictable or with descriptions that are elevated in significance. Finally, the independent indicative first aorist tense marks simple descriptions of setting, participants, etc.

The next four papers to be discussed all show how peak may be marked in narrative. In the Colombian language Guanano, Waltz (1976) finds that in addition to event line being distinguished, the peak of the narrative is marked by a discourse particle. In this language, the event line is reported be independent verbs, while material off the event line is reported by dependent ones. However, the *most important* events of the narrative also have a special marking. Aside from using various rhetorical devices, such as dialogue and onomatapoeia, Guanano uses a discourse particle to indicate peak. The particle *juna* "finally" occurs very frequently in Guanano narratives at their peaks. Though this particle has a few sentence level uses, the above-mentioned discourse function constitutes its predominant one.

A different type of tendency is noted in Ga'dang. Walrod (1977) reports that a particle *kanu* marks the most important event on the event line. However, at peak, this reliable marker begins to be used less frequently. In fact, it is used in

only 20 to 50 percent of the cases in which one would expect it to be used. Longacre (1985) explains this situation as being part of a general phenomenon in which peak in narrative is indicated by the standard event line marker fading out.

A similar case occurs in Northern Popoloca. Machin (1977) finds that, as is the case in Ga'dang, a discourse particle is used to signal the most important events on the event line. The particle in this case is *na*. However, what happens at peak in this language is even more striking than that which occurs in Ga'dang. While in the latter, the event line markers fades out, in Northern Popoloca it disappears completely. However, it is replaced by another particle – *are*.

Finally, in Biblical Hebrew, peak is indicated by a tense switch. In an analysis of "The Flood Narrative," Longacre (1979a) notes that the event line is marked by a fused particle *waw* plus "what appears to be a modified form of the imperfect tense of the Hebrew verb" (Longacre, 1985, p. 90). Conversely, material off the event line is marked by the perfect tense. This predictable marking occurs until peak is reached, at which point material *on the event line* is reported by the perfect tense. Hence, the change functions to focus the reader's attention in on the peak of the story.

While the above papers show that event line *and* relative significance may be grammaticized, the next paper focuses on the marking of relative importance. Jones and Nellis (1979) claim that there exists a discourse particle in Cajonos Zapotec that "highlights material which is important from the speaker's perspective" (Jones & Nellis, 1979, p. 189). The particle that functions in this way is *na'a*. There are instances in Cajonos Zapotec in which *na'a* is translated as 'now,' but in general it has a function which defies a simple lexical

gloss. In narrative, the basic function of *na'a* is to mark what a speaker views as significant. However, the particular function of the particle varies according to where it is placed in the sentence. *Na'a* may function to highlight four extragrammatical notions. First of all, when it occurs with the grammatical subject, it highlights a thematic agent in the narrative. The thematic agent is the individual who is the focal or central actor in a given chunk of the narrative. Not surprisingly, this character carries out most of the actions in the given section. However, a character may be introduced early in the narrative and not be marked with the discourse particle. He or she would be "tagged with *na'a* only at the time when he (began) to take an important role in the story" (Jones & Nellis, 1979, p. 193). Furthermore, in principle, there are no restrictions on the number of times that a character may be highlighted. Evidently, a character would normally be highlighted once in the section in which he was considered the thematic agent, but the number of sections in which the same major participant could be the thematic agent is not restricted.

Secondly, when the discourse particle occurs with the grammatical object, it draws attention to an inanimate object that plays a vital role in the plot. Such an inanimate object is termed a prop. Props are highlighted only when they become significant in the unfolding of the story. For example, in "The Lion and the Fox" story, there is a scenario in which a lion has cornered a fox, who is leaning against a rock at the back of a cave wall. The fox then tells the lion that he is tiring from holding up the cave wall, and that he needs someone to take his place. The lion agrees – and the fox escapes. In this section, the rock is marked with *na'a* at the crucial point when the lion takes the place of the fox. Clearly, this is a crucial moment, since "this is when the lion succumbed to the fox's deception, . . . and the rock is the crucial prop since it is the object central to the

deception" (Jones & Nellis, 1979, p. 197).

Thirdly, *na'a* in conjunction with predicates underscores pivotal events. A pivotal event is the most *important* event occurring within a group of related events. That is, these events would be surrounded by the same set of participants, and would occur within a certain time span. Few events in the narrative are considered pivotal ones. "Therefore, such events, when taken together as a group, represent a high-level abstraction of the narrative" (Jones & Nellis, 1979, p. 199).

Finally, when the particle is used with time expressions, it marks an important juncture in the chronology. For example, in the story "The Old Woman and the Town Authorities," the time expression *nach* "then" is followed by the particle *na'a*. Why the marker occurs here becomes apparent when the surrounding context is analyzed. In the tale, an old woman is fined and refuses to pay the town authorities. Finally, she makes a partial payment, but refuses to answer a summons. Throughout this section of the story, the trustee charged with collecting the fine has been patient with the old woman. However, after this last series of events, the trustee becomes impatient with the woman, since he feels he is being made a fool of. Hence, the use of *na'a* at this time juncture marks a turning point in the story, for "prior to this example the trustee has somewhat humored the old woman, but now he becomes angry and gives his helpers the authority to arrest her" (Jones & Nellis, 1979, p. 202).

Clearly, the above studies are not without merit. Firstly, all of them assume, whether implicitly or explicitly, that language must be studied from a functional viewpoint. Because they arise from such a perspective, these papers at least have the potential of yielding fruitful results. Secondly, these studies show

that different information types in narrative are indeed systematically separated. However, these works are severely limited by several serious problems.

First of all, in claiming the existence of morphosyntactic correlations, there are no figures given to indicate how often specific correlations were found. Because of this lack of empirical evidence, we have no way of knowing whether given functional notions correlated with grammatical mechanisms with very low frequency or extremely high frequency.

Secondly, while establishing objective criteria for what constitutes an action's being on or off the event line is not difficult, deciding what should be considered important, and to what degree is not so straightforward. In fact, I would argue that it is impossible to objectively determine the relative importance of every proposition in a narrative, precisely *because* importance is not an objective notion. In other words, material in a narrative cannot be inherently important. Rather, individuals must make subjective decisions about the relative importance of given propositions. Because of this, the approach taken in all of the above papers is fundamentally misguided.

Finally, assuming independent criteria cannot be established, decisions regarding which propositions belong to given levels of importance are essentially arbitrary. It seems probable that the linguists in question may have fallen into a methodological trap – that is, using structural evidence to identify information levels. In such a case, the arguments become hopelessly circular.

2.5 The Emergence of a General Theory

To this point, the works discussed have shown only that certain morphosyntactic markers may code information type in various languages. That is, claims about marking have been restricted to the language in question. However, with the appearance of Jones and Jones (1979), we see the first proposal that information type is marked, in some fashion or another, in *all* languages. Hence, a general theory emerges. As mentioned earlier, proponents of it believe three things: that information type in discourse is always systematically separated; further, that it correlates with given morphosyntactic features with such regularity that the marker can be said to *code* information type; and finally, that this marking is universal across languages.

Jones and Jones (1979) claim that information in discourse is structured, that it is marked by specific grammatical devices, and that these devices may vary from language to language. Furthermore, they feel that a distinction between events on or off an event line or between significant and non-significant information is not comprehensive enough. Hence, rather than positing a simple bi-partite structure, they propose a multi-level continuum, in which a proposition is regarded as being either more or less central to a given discourse theme. The actual breakdown is as follows:

Peak
Pivotal Events
Backbone Events
Ordinary Events
Significant Background
Ordinary Background

They claim that not all languages will have each level present in this continuum, but rather that this represents a "combination of the significant

levels of information found in human languages" (Jones & Jones, 1979, p. 7). Specifically, they propose that a language must minimally contain three information levels: "ordinary background, one of the event levels (either backbone or ordinary events), and peak" (Jones & Jones, 1979, p. 21-22).

Jones and Jones then go on to posit that certain grammatical structures correspond to each of these different levels, substantiating their claims with evidence from native American language families. However, they do not provide a satisfyingly clear way to isolate these various levels in a given text. It seems that background information is that which is off the event line of a narrative. As stated earlier, since the event line of a narrative can be easily established, this definition is not problematic. However, how would one distinguish *significant background* from *ordinary background* information? A similar problem arises with the description of the events. Presumably, peak, pivotal, backbone and ordinary events are part of the event line. In defining some of these levels, they claim that pivotal events are "very crucial or significant events of a narrative," while backbone events are "less significant than pivotal events" (Jones & Jones, 1979, p. 8). The distinction between these two is not very precise, and one is left to wonder what exactly constitutes an event's being *less significant*.

Furthermore, the serious criticisms levied against the papers that made language specific claims are also applicable here. If the use of circular reasoning is a major flaw in these previous studies, its fallacy becomes magnified when applied to a theory that makes language universal claims.

The next two papers to be discussed are linguistic milestones, and as such, have influenced all subsequent work in this area. These works are very important, because aside from proposing that information type is universally

coded, they were the first to offer a higher level discourse explanation for why this coding should occur. Furthermore, they introduced two new labels which subsume the extrasentential notions *on/off the event line* and *relative importance*. Specifically, they coined the terms *foreground* and *background* information. The introduction of these terms actually caused significant problems, as will be seen shortly. Nonetheless, these terms would be the ones that most later work would adopt. In fact, these papers were so influential, that the general theory described earlier came to be known as that of *foregrounding* and *backgrounding*. These groundbreaking studies are Hopper (1979) and Hopper and Thompson (1980).

In Hopper (1979) foreground information is simply that which is on the event line of the narrative. Conversely, background information is that which is off this line. Hence, in the definitions that explain the difference between foreground and background information, we see the familiar temporal distinction.

> "The difference between the sentences in the foreground and the ones in the background has to do with sequentiality. The foregrounded events succeed one another in the narrative in the same order as their succession in the real world; it is in other words an iconic order" (Hopper, 1979, p. 214).

Furthermore, "only foregrounded clauses are actually narrated. Background clauses do not themselves narrate, but instead they support, amplify or comment on the narration" (Hopper, 1979, p. 215).

With the defining criteria established, Hopper then goes on to demonstrate how the distinction is coded by various morphosyntactic means – namely tense-aspect, word order and voice. Hopper cites French and Russian as

examples of the kinds of languages that realize the foreground-background distinction through specialized verb morphology. In French, the two relevant tense-aspects are the passé simple (the past historic), which is a tense restricted to literary domains, and the imparfait (the imperfect). According to Hopper, the passé simple codes foreground information and the imparfait background information.

In Russian, the perfective and imperfective aspects are claimed to correlate with the foreground and background information respectively. Apparently, the perfective form of the verb is used in conjunction with "single, sequential events and the imperfective in clauses containing backgrounded material: descriptions of scenery and natural phenomena, subordinate events which are repeated (i.e., iteratives), and activities which are viewed as occurring simultaneously with the main events" (Hopper, 1979, p. 218).

Secondly, foregrounding through word order is illustrated in Anglo-Saxon narrative discourse. Considering the position of the verb with respect to the other constituents in a sentence, three orders were possible in Old English; these were VS, OV and SV. The first two orders characterize foreground information and the latter background. This alternation between VS and OV is seen to be somewhat arbitrary. In certain instances, VS is used at the beginning of an "episode" in the narrative, and is subsequently followed by OV clauses until the end of the episode is reached. However, often times clear motivation for this break is lacking. In contrast to these two word orders, the SV order correlated with background information – that is "whenever the narrative material (was) part of the supporting or amplifying discourse rather than that of the main story line" (Hopper, 1979, p. 222).

Finally, Hopper cites Malay and Tagalog as languages which manifest the

foreground-background distinction through voice. In both of these languages, passive verbs are claimed to code foreground information and active verbs background information. Hopper notes that the Malay "passive" rarely corresponds to the notion that we have of passive in English. Instead, the verb is used "for events that are perfective, active, foregrounded, and realis (as opposed to irrealis)" (Hopper, 1979, p. 228).

In Tagalog, the passive verb is the perfective-realis form of a given verb stem. This form is made up of different affixes depending on whether the verb in question is transitive or intransitive. These verbs clearly function to code foreground information in Tagalog narratives, since they appear in "clauses which actually advance the story line and narrate new events" (Hopper, 1979, p. 235). In contrast, backgrounding is indicated by verb forms that lack the perfective-realis markers.

That certain languages may contain devices that code information on and off the event line of a narrative is not a new claim. We have seen evidence for this in numerous field studies on languages. However, what sets Hopper's work apart from this early research is his belief that this coding is not restricted to a smattering of languages. While the goal of early studies that showed evidence of this coding was to explain the function of all markers in the given language, Hopper's goal is quite different. When he cites evidence from specific languages for the coding of information type, it is to show how a *general tendency* is exhibited in the particular exemplars. That is, the evidence is intended to provide support for the claim that the coding of information type is a universal process. And Hopper clearly believes that this distinction is indeed manifested in all languages.

> ". . . the foreground-background distinction is a universal of some kind, one that may be realized formally in a number of different ways depending on the language concerned" (Hopper, 1979, p. 217).

Another difference between Hopper's work and previous research is that Hopper explains *why* information type would be systematically separated and marked. He believes that this marking "allows the listener (reader) to store the actual events of the discourse as a linear group while simultaneously processing accumulations of commentary and supportive information which add texture but not substance to the discourse" (Hopper, 1979, p.220). In other words, this alleged linguistic universal originates in a general pragmatic function.

Hopper and Thompson's (1980) paper has implications for typologists and syntacticians as well as for linguists interested in studying language from a broader discourse perspective. Their chief purpose was to demonstrate the pervasiveness of transitivity in languages throughout the world. According to Hopper and Thompson, the presence of an object of a verb is only one of several criteria that determines a clause's transitivity. In fact, they propose a set of characteristics that define transitivity, such that transitivity is construed as a relative rather than a binary notion. That is, a given clause may be more or less transitive depending on how many components from the transitivity scale it exhibits. The relevant parameters include, "the punctuality and telicity of the verb, the conscious activity of the agent, and the referentiality and degree of affectedness of the object" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 251). Even though very diverse morphosyntactic categories make up the continuum, they are all united by one general notion – that is, all the categories are "concerned with the effectiveness with which an action takes place" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p.

251). Without providing the numerous details from their typological survey, suffice it to say that Hopper and Thompson conclude that "transitivity is a central relationship in the grammars of human languages" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 254). In seeing the importance of this phenomenon, they sought to find a higher level explanation which would account for what was so important about transitivity. They proposed that the discourse based theory of foregrounding-backgrounding would account for the global importance of transitivity; for the same features that characterize high transitivity also characterize foregrounding. Hence, to provide "empirical" evidence for this claim, Hopper and Thompson investigated three texts for the presence of foreground and background information. They hoped to show that the features characterizing transitivity would also correlate with foreground information. In short, this is what they found, as can be seen from the summary of their results provided below.

To pick out some highlights, note that clauses with two or more participants were found in foreground clauses 76 percent of the time, while they were found in background clauses 18 percent of the time, highly kinetic verbs were found in foreground clauses 88 percent of the time and found in background clauses 49 percent of the time, and affirmative realis clauses occurred in foreground clauses in every instance.

	High	Low	Foreground	Background
A. Participants	2 or more participants	1 participant	76	18
B. Kinesis	action	non-action	88	49
C. Aspect	telic	atelic	88	27
D. Punctuality	punctual	non-punctual	55	10
E. Volitionality	volitional	non-volitional	76	36
F. Affirmation	affirmative	negative	100	92
G. Mode	realis	irrealis	100	66
H. Agency	A high in potency	A low in potency	–	–
I. Affectedness of O	O totally affected	O not affected	39	12
J. Individuation of O	O highly individuated	O non-individuated	–	–

Hence, on the basis of these high correlations, Hopper and Thompson concluded that this discourse based phenomenon could indeed accurately explain the importance of transitivity. Furthermore, they provide a reason to account for the existence of this phenomenon. They believe that "grounding itself reflects a deeper set of principles – relating to decisions which speakers make on the basis of their assessment of their hearers' situation" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 295). That is, foregrounded information is overtly marked so that the hearer (reader) can pay special attention to it.

However, some major criticisms must be levied at this time. First of all, though they provide percentages for the correlations, (and some of them are quite high), no statistical analysis was performed to determine the significance of these figures. Particularly suspect are the figures for *affirmation*. Foregrounded clauses are affirmative 100 percent of the time, while background

clauses are affirmative 92 percent of the time. Is it really reasonable to conclude that affirmative information is coded by foregrounded clauses?

The second criticism is much more serious. As stated above, Hopper and Thompson's conclusions are based on the existence of these high correlations. However, the validity of their results would be seriously compromised if the clauses identified as being foregrounded were in fact not the actual foregrounded clauses. That is, the soundness of their conclusions rest crucially on the assumption that what they have identified are *true* foregrounded clauses. Hence, the question arises as to whether subjects, given the same three texts, could identify the same clauses that Hopper and Thompson did.

To test this question, nine subjects in a pilot study were asked to identify foreground and background information based on the definitions given by Hopper and Thompson. Hopper and Thompson defined foreground information as "the material which supplies the main points of the discourse" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 280). Conversely, background information was defined as "that part of a discourse which does not immediately and crucially contribute to the speaker's goal, but which merely assists, amplifies or comments on it" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 280). One of the texts containing the judgements made by Hopper and Thompson is provided below. (Foregrounded material is italicized).

> 'Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?) My brother put a knife in my head. (How'd that happen?) Like kids, you get into a fight and I twisted his arm up behind him.
>
> This was just a few days after my father had died, and we were sitting shive. And the reason the fight started . . . *He sort of ran out in the yard — this was way out on Coney Island* — and *he started to talk about it.* And my mother had just sat down to have a cup of coffee. And *I told him to cut it out.*
>
> 'Course kids, you know — he don't hafta listen to me. So that's when

> *I grabbed him by the arm*, and *twisted it up behind him*. When I let go his arm, there was a knife on the table, *he just picked it up* and *he let me have it*. And *I started to bleed like a pig*.
>
> 'And naturally, first things was – *run to the doctor*. And the doctor just says, "Just about this much more," he says, "and you'd a been dead." (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 281).

The results indicated that, generally speaking, subjects could not identify the clauses that Hopper and Thompson did. Specifically, *no* subject identified the nine and *only* the nine clauses that Hopper and Thompson identified. Some striking disagreements warrant reporting. With respect to the ninth clause indicated by Hopper and Thompson (*run to the doctor*), only 3 out of 9 subjects felt that it should be considered foreground information. Conversely, 6 out of 9 subjects felt that the clause *my father had died* should be foregrounded. Based on the definitions provided above, it is difficult to understand why this clause mentioning the father's death was not picked by Hopper and Thompson. Certainly, it seems to supply one of the main points of the discourse, in that, it supplies the reason that the fight occurred in the first place.

Why couldn't subjects identify the same clauses that Hopper and Thompson did? Possibly Hopper and Thompson were mistaken in their judgements. Possibly the definitions are not explicit enough to allow accurate identification. Possibly the main points of a discourse can never be objectively identified, since what is deemed a *main point* may vary from person to person. However, the actual reason is probably something quite different. As pointed out by Matthew Dryer (personal communication, 1987), the crucial problem is that the definition of foreground information actually contains two distinct notions. This becomes obvious when we examine amplifications of the definition offered by Hopper and Thompson. In addition to the previous definitions, foreground information is described as "actual sequential events" and "clauses ordered in a

temporal sequence" (Hopper &Thompson, 1980, p. 281). Background information is seen as being made up of "clauses which are not ordered with respect to each other" and "scene-setting statements and evaluative commentary" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 281). The first set of definitions has to do with the centrality or importance of certain information with respect to the discourse theme. The second set has to do with whether or not a given clause is part of the sequence that narrates the actual events of the story. Hence, we see that the notions of *on/off the event line* and *importance* that have been painstakingly explicated in this literature review have been confounded. That is, two distinct notions have been presented as different characteristics of *one* definition.

Clearly, there may be cases in which important clauses are part of the event line. In fact, such a scenario may even constitute the norm. However, even though there is an association between these two notions of foregrounding, it is imperative that they be kept distinct. Without a precise characterization of foregrounding, it is impossible to objectively test hypotheses such as the one that Hopper and Thompson offer.

Since the term *foregrounding* sometimes corresponds to one notion, sometimes to the other, and sometimes to both, I will henceforth discontinue the use of this term. For the sake of clarity, the terms *on/off the event line* and *importance* will continue to be used.

Thirdly, Hopper and Thompson's decision to regard importance as a binary notion is disturbing. It seems intuitively plausible that an individual, when encountering a set of propositions, would find that some propositions would be relatively more important than others. That there should exist an obvious cut-

off line between important and non-important information seems unlikely. As such, an approach like the one outlined in Jones and Jones (1979) seems more feasible.

Finally, the same criticism regarding the determination of importance is also applicable here. Hence, at this point, I think it would be useful to re-iterate the criticisms that apply to all work done to this point.

2.5.1 Major Problems with Studies Investigating Coding of Information Level

The studies discussed to this point are severely limited by at least four major problems. The first of these arises from a lack of thoroughness, and as such, could be easily remedied. Frequently, in the relevant studies, the frequency with which a given morphosyntactic marker co-occurs with information type is not indicated. Hence, one is left to speculate about the exact level of this relative frequency; was the phenomenon observed once, half of the time or all of the time? Clearly, the absence of these figures undermines the conclusions of these studies. Yet, even in studies in which figures are provided (such as Hopper and Thompson 1980), no statistical analysis is performed to indicate whether or not the results are statistically viable. Again, any conclusions drawn in a paper containing such a weakness are clearly suspect.

Secondly, the number of narratives on which conclusions are based is very small. It is assumed that the narratives studied are representative of all narratives in the particular language. However, this clearly may not be the case.

Thirdly, and more seriously, all studies that use theorists' judgements as a means of identifying important information are fundamentally misguided. In order to understand the nature and magnitude of this problem, it will be

necessary to examine in detail how information is assumed to be coded. To begin with, it will be useful to reflect on the general discourse context out of which narratives arise. Clearly, a narrative is told *by* a speaker *to* a listener. Such a situation involves the *interaction* of the speaker and the listener. The speaker's general purpose is to communicate the actual propositional content of the message, plus any intentions s/he may have. Related to this, the speaker will deem some information to be more important than other information. Hence, in order to convey this to the listener, the speaker attaches an overt marker to the important information.

At the other end of this interchange is the listener. His or her general goal is to understand what the speaker is trying to convey. Hence, when the important information reaches the listener, s/he will notice the presence of the importance marker, and consequently be alerted to the fact that the speaker intends that s/he pay special attention to this information.

Clearly, the *determination* of what is important is made by the speaker. Hence, we come to the crux of the problem. How, in a narrative created by one person (who has his own subjective determination of what is important) can a particular linguist determine what the first viewed as important? Short of asking the original narrator, it is impossible to do this. Yet, this is precisely what authors of the aforementioned papers have done. They have studied narratives created by other people, and identified, on their own, so-called important information. The reason that they cannot objectively determine the relative importance of every proposition in the narratives is *because* importance is not an objective notion. Clearly, in order to eliminate this problem, the individual who determines the relative importance must be the same individual who relates the story. Such an approach will be further

explicated at the conclusion of this literature review.

Finally, and related to the above problem, is the error of using circular reasoning. Assuming that objective criteria for what determines importance cannot be established, decisions regarding which propositions belong to various levels of importance are essentially arbitrary. It seems probable that the authors of the papers in question may have used morphosyntactic evidence to identify information levels. In such a case, the arguments would be impossibly circular.

In summary, the most influential papers to date have been Hopper (1979) and Hopper and Thompson (1980). One of their more important claims is that information type is marked in some fashion or another, in languages throughout the world. Studies that have lent support to this claim are numerous. Yet, from these disparate studies, several common claims emerge. These will be elucidated in the following section.

2.6 Specific Morphosyntactic Markers Coding Information Type

From surveying the relevant literature, one can identify three general morphosyntactic markers that are alleged to code information type. These are: clause type (Labov & Waletzky 1967; Townsend & Bever 1977; Talmy, 1978; Hopper 1979; Wallace 1982; Thompson 1987; Reinhart in press), voice (Hopper 1979; Hopper & Thompson 1980; Wallace 1982) and aspect (Forsyth 1970; Reid 1977; Hopper 1979; Hopper & Thompson 1980; Wallace 1982; Rafferty 1982; Li, S. Thompson & R. McMillan Thompson 1982; Fox 1983; Waugh & Monville-Burston 1986).

First of all, "it has been traditionally assumed that subordinate and non-

finite clauses must be associated with backgrounding rather than foregrounding" (Myhill & Hibiya, in press). In particular, the first three studies to be discussed assume a correlation between dependent clauses and material off the event line of a narrative. The last three papers show how non-important information may be coded by dependent clauses. The first reference to an association between subordinate clauses and material which does not narrate the events of a story comes from Labov and Waletzky (1967). They claim that main clauses are necessarily on the event line, while subordinate clauses are off it. Hopper (1979) also believes that information on the event line will be reported in the main verb and its complements. Finally, Thompson (1987) provides evidence for an association between dependent clauses and non-event line material.

However, there are also papers that claim that background material, as used in the Gestalt sense (see Wallace 1982), correlates with dependent clauses. Townsend and Bever (1977) and Talmy (1978) propose that main clauses function as figures, and subordinate clauses as grounds. These terms correspond to the notion of relative importance, in that grounds are seen to be less salient, and less "meaningful" than figures, which are more salient and more "meaningful" (Wallace, 1982, p. 215). Thompson (1983) claims that the English detached participial clause "serves as a device that allows the speaker/writer to present certain material as background against which certain other material can be put forth as "figure" in the Gestalt sense." (Thompson, 1983, p. 44). Finally, Tomlin (1985) shows how the less important information of English narratives tends to be placed in dependent clauses. Tomlin's work is actually much more important that its limited mention here would suggest, and as such, will be further discussed shortly.

With respect to the coding of information type by voice, two different claims emerge depending on the type of language involved. In most western Indo-European languages, passives are quite infrequent (Svartvik 1966). In these types of languages, passives, if they code information type at all, are assumed to code information off the event line. For example, Hopper and Thompson (1980) posit that there is an association between active as on the event line and passive as off it. However, it seems that in some Austronesian languages, passive codes the opposite notion. As mentioned previously, the "passives" in languages such as Malay and Tagalog do not function in the same way that they do in English. Furthermore, the passives in these languages constitute the rule rather than the exception. It is claimed that in languages such as these, the passive construction codes information *on* the event line.

Finally, we come to the notion of aspect. Various aspectual distinctions have been claimed to code information type. These include the perfect in Mandarin, the progressive in English, and most frequently the perfective aspect. In fact, that perfective aspect codes information type is one of the most prevalent claims encountered in the literature. So pervasive is this notion that the coding has, perhaps prematurely, been assumed to be a language universal.

> "Hopper (1977/79), (1979) has shown that an explanation for the universality of the distinction between categories (1), the durative or imperfective and (2), the punctual, or perfective, can be given in terms of their different discourse functions: the perfective is used to relate or narrate events, while the imperfective is used to provide information on ongoing, concurrent, background happenings" (Li, S. Thompson & R. McMillan Thompson, 1982, p. 19).

Virtually all studies focusing on the perfective/imperfective opposition and its relationship to information type view perfective aspect as occurring on the

event line, and imperfective aspect occurring off it. Forsyth (1970), in an analysis of the Russian aspectual system, claims that the perfective is used to express a sequence of actions, and as such carries the narrative forward. On the other hand, imperfective verbs "all (accompany) each other more or less on a single plane of time, with no clear indication of concurrence or sequence" (Forsyth, 1970, p. 10).

Reid (1977) also believes information type is coded. The passé simple and the imparfait are seen to correlate with one of the two notions that make up information type; however, whether it is importance or on/off the event line is not entirely clear. Initially, Reid proposes that the passé simple is associated with high focus, and the imparfait with low focus. These focus terms actually correspond to relative importance, as can be seen from the following quote.

> "The two tenses are doing the same thing in a written narrative that we all do orally in telling a story, namely raising our voice for the important events and dropping it for the less important ones" (Reid, 1977, p. 60).

However, later in the paper, Reid claims verbs in the passé simple "are bounded in time by being immediately and necessarily sequential" (Reid, 1977, p. 61).

Hopper's (1979) analysis of the French verbal system is actually based on data from Reid. However, Hopper simply claims that the passé simple is used on the event line, while the imparfait is used off it.

Wallace (1982) also supports the view that perfective and imperfective correspond to material on and off the event line respectively. He asserts that "if a language has a contrast between a perfective (completive, non-durative, punctual) aspect and other aspects, then part of the meaning of the perfective aspect, at least in narration, is to specify major, sequential, foregrounded

events, while part of the meaning of the contrasting non-perfective aspects, particularly an imperfective, is to give supportive background information" (Wallace, 1982, p. 209).

Fox (1983) finds evidence for the non-finite form of the Greek verb (the participle) occurring off the event line of given narratives, while the finite form of the verb is restricted to clauses on the event line. She noted that participles never occurred in temporally ordered sequences, and thus concluded that "participles are never used to describe foregrounded events, but rather are used to describe backgrounded events" (Fox, 1983, p. 38).

Finally, Waugh and Monville-Burston (1986) suggest that while the passé simple has several different functions in French, it is most frequently used with information on the event line, and thus may function to code this type of information.

As is apparent from the studies above, verbal oppositions of more than one name are subsumed under the labels of perfective and imperfective. This decision to collapse specific categories is not entirely unmotivated. Such an approach is common in the literature. That is, the terms perfective and imperfective are used to describe the verbal systems of languages in which these notions have overt morphological markers *and* in languages that do not overtly mark either of these aspects. However, one might, with good reason , wonder whether it is appropriate to talk about perfective/imperfective oppositions in languages that do not have overt morphological markers for these aspects. Hence, a crucial question arises that demands an answer — that is, must aspect be morphologically realized or not?

As might be suspected, there are opposing views on this issue. There are linguists who believe that aspect need not be overtly marked, and those who

believe it must be. Proponents of the first belief suggest that the notion of aspect is both semantic and morphological. For example, in languages such as Russian, the perfective and imperfective aspects are indicated by specific morphological inflections on the verb. But, each of these two aspects has distinct meanings, and it is these distinct meanings that have markers in such languages. However, in some languages, the meanings of the imperfective and perfective do not have markers that represent them. Hence, in such languages, one must look at the meaning expressed by the verb in the context of a particular sentence to decide if the verb is in the perfective or imperfective aspect.

What is crucial to this latter view is that the distinct meanings of the particular aspects can indeed be adequately defined. In general, it is proposed that perfective events are punctual, completive and non-habitual. Imperfective events are said to be durative, continuative or habitual.

Three linguists who subscribe to this notion of semantically based aspect are Hopper (1982) and Myhill and Hibiya (in press). This can be seen from the following quotations.

> ". . . the term aspect is restricted to the discussion of the semantic/pragmatic division of what is often called 'actions with a view to their completion,' that is, aspect in the Slavists' sense of perfective and imperfective, but without of course, the implication of morphological realization of any particular kind" (Hopper, 1982, p. 5).

> "Since our purpose here is cross-linguistic comparison, we did not code for morphologically marked aspect in the languages studied, but rather for universally applicable conceptual aspectual categories" (Myhill & Hibiya, in press).

In general it is assumed that these general semantically based definitions of

perfectivity and imperfectivity are desirable because they allow cross-linguistic comparison. Yet how valid is it to impose the linguistic categories of one language on another? Applying the notion of aspect to English is not problematic, since English is not without an aspectual system. It contains an opposition between the progressive and the non-progressive. The progressive, which conveys a concrete action in the course of its development, is morphologically marked. This familiar marker is of course *-ing*. With respect to the general semantically based definitions of perfectivity and imperfectivity, the progressive is assumed to correspond to the imperfective, and the non-progressive to the perfective. However, there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between the English progressive and the Slavic imperfective (Mourelatos 1981; Matveyeva 1985; Kozintseva 1985). Kozintseva finds that while there is a tendency for the English progressive to be translated as an imperfective, the tendency is not strong enough to allow any predictive power. In particular, he notes that the past progressive is translated as an imperfective 84 percent of the time and as a perfective 16 percent of the time. The English present progressive exhibits an even lower frequency, translating as an imperfective 74 percent of the time and as a perfective 26 percent of the time.

This brings us to the issue of trying to code for perfectivity and imperfectivity in languages that do not utilize such an opposition. As Myhill and Hibiya (in press) state, it is quite difficult to code perfectivity in an objective fashion without having to make "an extremely large number of arbitrary decisions." Consider the task of coding some English data. No English verbal categories correspond exactly to the perfective and imperfective. Furthermore, as stated above, even the most reliable marker (the progressive) can be either of these aspects.

Considerations about empirical evidence aside, I would argue that the terms perfective and imperfective, at least as in the Slavicists' sense, are not psychologically real for speakers of English. This is not to deny the possible existence of *general* universal semantic categories. It may well be that extralinguistic notions such as *incompleted action* can be talked about even in languages that do not have an overt marker for such notions. However, to reiterate, that the Slavic notions of perfectivity and imperfectivity have psychological reality for speakers of English is unlikely. This is an important point when we consider the process by which information type is supposed to be coded.

Consider again what the theory claims – that a *morphosyntactic* marker is attached to certain information so that a listener may specially attend to this information. Hence, an overt marker must be present in the language to convey the information. Thus, in French, the passé simple form of the verb may code the notion of event line. In Russian, the perfective form of the verb may indicate the same notion. Yet, how would perfectivity indicate event line to an English listener? There is simply no morphosyntactic marker for the listener to find. Hence, instead of focusing on categories that do not exist, it seems reasonable instead to investigate an aspectual opposition that *does* operate in English. That is, why not investigate the co-occurrence of the *progressive* and information type?

In summary then, one can see that previous work, though not without merit is weakened by several methodological defects. These weaknesses have not gone entirely unnoticed. As such, some linguists have addressed many of the problems encountered in this early work. Notably, the work of Russell Tomlin stems from his dissatisfaction with the methodology utilized in previous studies.

2.7 Tomlin's Work

Tomlin (1985) makes an effort to cope with problems characterizing early work by proposing an innovative methodology. As will be seen shortly, he deals with these inadequacies with varying degrees of success. First of all, Tomlin addresses the persistent methodological problem present in all early work. He argues that "for any particular form-function hypothesis , it is necessary that the pertinent syntactic forms and semantic/pragmatic functions be identified independently of one another" (Tomlin, 1985, p. 86). As we have seen, failure to do this results in circularity. However, finding a way to accurately identify important information is difficult. To date, no method has been proposed that will allow this accurate identification. This is where Tomlin proposes an innovation. He suggests that the first step in independent identification is to move away from text-bounded analysis. Hence, he proposes that subjects watch a film/video and subsequently provide an oral narrative that recounts this film. He claims that events which subjects have perceived as more psychologically significant will also turn out to be more important in the above-mentioned descriptive task. Thus, a text- independent way of identifying important information is finally developed.

Secondly, he notes the lack of either figures which show the frequency of association between form and function or statistical analysis performed on these figures. He further claims that conditions which constitute coding must be made explicit, and suggests that certain levels of significance should be construed as showing support for the existence of coding.

Finally, Tomlin suggests that multi-subject data should be used in testing hypotheses. He notes that "while evidence from single subjects may result in

strong hypotheses, such evidence constitutes only the very weakest test of the hypothesis" (Tomlin, 1985, p. 88).

Tomlin's objective is to test the assumption that independent clauses code foreground information and dependent clauses background information. His definition of foreground information corresponds to the notion of importance. Thus, foreground information is information which is important, or significant, or central to the narrative." Background information "serves to elaborate or enrich foreground information" (Tomlin, 1985, p. 87)

Tomlin's methodology is as follows: First of all, events were rated as +/- significant by a group of subjects in a non-linguistic task. Secondly, a different group of 15 subjects provided four types of narratives – on-line oral description, oral delayed description, written delayed description and written edited description. For each of these narratives, information levels were identified based on previously identified levels of significance. Thus, "a proposition (represented) pivotal information if, and only if, it (was) the most general proposition describing a significant event. A proposition represented foreground information if, and only if, it (was) the most general proposition describing any other event. All other propositions represented background information" (Tomlin, 1985, p. 90).

The results showed that, first of all, "the mean frequency of dependent clauses increases as one increases the degree to which discourse production can be planned" (Tomlin, 1985, p. 100). Secondly, even though this occurred, the average proportion of dependent clauses was roughly the same for each of the four production conditions. In fact, "about 80 percent of all dependent clauses co-occur with background propositions, and they do so irrespective of the particular discourse production condition" (Tomlin, 1985, p. 101). In short, it

seems that dependent clauses correlate with background information, and independent clauses with foreground information. Tomlin construes this to mean that clause type indeed codes information level – just as the hypothesis suggests.

However, the strength of Tomlin's conclusion is seriously diminished by several problems. First of all, Tomlin claimed to address the problem of treating importance as an objective notion by having subjects judge the importance of events in the film. However, since the group that made the judgements was not the same group that described the film, it is possible that what the first group saw as important was not necessarily what the second one saw as important. Tomlin tries to justify his approach by noting that individuals seem to perceive events in remarkably similar ways. However, this clearly does not alter the fact that they *may* perceive them in different ways. Thus, potential individual variation cannot be dealt with or accounted for. In short then, even Tomlin's approach doesn't allow for individual determination of what is important. Yet, it is clear that in order to claim that certain correlations exist, one must first be certain that the analyzed clauses are indeed important or non-important clauses.

The next criticism has to do with the operationalization of a particular definition. In Tomlin's schema, *descriptions* must be considered as background information. Thus, no provision is made for the fact that the notion of importance is a general one which may be applied to both events *and* descriptions. In Tomlin's framework, there would be no way to accommodate the judgement of a subject who deemed certain descriptions to be significant or central to the narrative. Clearly, such a scenario can be easily envisioned. For

example, in the film used in the study to follow, a woman's life is shown. At the beginning of the film, she walks through a garden in what is clearly the spring of the year. At the end, she returns to the same garden – only the season has changed to fall. The seasons have great symbolic import in this film. Thus, the majority of subjects viewed them as being crucial to the narrative. Yet, these facts have to be reported as *descriptions*.

Finally, there is a major theoretical weakness in this paper. Tomlin finds that correlations between clause type and information level are significant, and thus concludes that clause type *codes* information level. Yet coding does not exist in a vacuum. Surely, a marker that codes a given functional notion demands a receiver. That is, a hearer must infer the meaning of a given marker in order to claim that coding exists. Hence, even if very high correlations are found, one has to be certain that the hearer makes the given inference – and this clearly is an empirical issue.

The above criticisms are not intended to diminish the importance of the contribution of Tomlin's work to the understanding of the relationship between language and discourse. Specifically, his research has contributed much to our understanding of how information types may be coded by grammatical mechanisms. As such, his 1985 study represents a crucial step in the development of a methodology that will allow us to accurately test for correlations between morphosyntactic markers and information type.

In summary, Tomlin's work has made an important contribution, and has stimulated further interest in the topic of how information type may be coded in languages. However, most published research after 1985 has few new insights to offer.

2.8 Current Studies

The most recent work investigating the coding of information type is Thompson (1987). She notes the fundamental confusion of the two distinct notions of *importance* and *on the event line*, and claims that while sequentiality may have morphosyntactic markers, that importance may not (Kalmar 1982; McLeary 1982). Thompson analyzes two English written narratives and finds a correlation between subordinate clauses and information off the event line. In particular, she discovers that with respect to subordinate predicates, 11 percent of them occur on the time line, while 89 percent of them occur off it. Hence, she concludes that in English narratives, the "vast majority of subordinate predicates will not be on the time line" (Thompson, 1987, p. 445).

However, her conclusions are suspect for three reasons. First of all, part of her criterion for what constitutes an event's being on the time line is puzzling. In order to arrive at the predicates that constituted the time line, she determined "which predicates named a punctual event that followed the previous sequenced event and preceded the following sequenced event" (Thompson, 1987, p. 442). Hence, at first blush, she appears to be using a criterion of temporal sequentiality to determine the predicates on the time line. However, she also claims that only *punctual* events can be temporally sequenced. Durative predicates are not counted as part of the temporal sequence. Yet, surely whether an event is on or off the time line is independent of whether it is durative or punctual. Hence, the inclusion of this criterion is puzzling. One can only assume that it was included because many durative events function to signal events that occur simultaneously with sequenced events. However, if such predicates were found in particular narratives, they could be eliminated on grounds of non-temporal sequentiality. Why this additional criterion is needed is not clear.

Secondly, Thompson has not normalized the analyzed narratives for clause type. She states that 89 percent of subordinate predicates occur off the time line. However, she has not indicated how many *main* predicates occur off the time line. This information is crucial, since it is possible to envision a narrative which is primarily composed of subordinate predicates. In other words, if a storyteller used *mostly* subordinate predicates, a discovery that found 89 percent of them to be off the time line would not be very interesting.

Finally, even if Thompson had normalized for clause type, her results would be of limited generalizability since only two narratives were analyzed.

2.9 Motivation for the Present Study

The major weaknesses of all work to date are both methodological and theoretical. First of all, no study has allowed individual determination of importance. As claimed earlier, this is an essential criterion, since in order to claim that certain correlations between form and function hold, one must first be certain that the identified clauses were in fact seen as important or non-important.

Secondly, no study has tested systematically for correlations with both event line *and* importance. Thompson (1987) tested for correlations between a morphosyntactic marker and event line. Tomlin (1985) claimed to have tested for correlations between a morphosyntactic marker and importance. Yet, it is imperative that both claims be tested, especially since these notions are the ones confounded in many definitions of foreground information. Testing for correlations with the two notions allows the experimenter to examine three claims. One can see whether morphosyntactic markers correlate significantly

with event line, whether they correlate significantly with importance, or whether they correlate significantly with *important* information on the event line.

Thirdly, in previous work, when subjects have rated importance, they have been asked to treat importance and non-importance as discrete notions. As claimed earlier, importance must clearly be viewed as operating across a continuum in which some propositions are relatively more important than others.

These inadequacies can be addressed by employing a research design such as the one outlined in the next chapter. Before proceeding with this section however, let us consider a list of requirements which must be followed in order to test claims made in the general hypothesis.

2.9.1 Requirements for Testing for Correlations between Morphosyntactic Markers and Information Type

Five requirements will be posited, the first two of which have also been recommended by Tomlin (1984b, 1985). First of all, multi-subject data must be used in order to distinguish idiosyncrasies from group tendencies. If the coding of information type is proposed to be a process utilized by English speakers in general, clearly data from one subject is unlikely to be representative. Therefore, I will be following Tomlin's work by using such multi-subject data.

Secondly, morphosyntactic forms and extralinguistic notions must be identified independently of one another. As indicated earlier, failure to do this results in circularity. Hence, there must be a text-independent way of identifying important information. Again, I will be following Tomlin's work by using a film to allow for independent identification of important information.

Thirdly, any study investigating the alleged coding of importance must allow for individual determination of importance. To reiterate, this is imperative since in order to claim that certain correlations between form and function exist, one must first be certain that the identified clauses were in fact seen as important or non-important. In view of this, the following study will allow for individual determination.

Fourthly, importance must be regarded as a relative rather than a discrete notion. Hence, when subjects rate the importance of various components of a film, they will use a scale so that *relative* importance can be determined.

Finally, since importance is a general notion, and not one restricted to events, a subject must be able to make decisions about the relative importance of *all* components of a film. The study outlined in the following chapter will provide for this by letting subjects rate the relative importance of all components present in the film.

3. THE EXPERIMENT

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the experiments designed to test whether information type correlates with clause type are described.

The three hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Clause type correlates with the notion *on/off the event line*. That is, independent clauses correlate with information on the event line; dependent clauses correlate with information off it.

Hypothesis 2: Clause type correlates with relative importance as determined by the subject. That is, independent clauses correlate with more important information; dependent clauses correlate with less important information.

Hypothesis 3: Clause type correlates with the combination of relative importance and *on/off the event line*. That is, the proportion of *independent* clauses denoting important events on the event line is greater than the proportion of *dependent* clauses denoting important events on the event line.

3.2 Subjects

Fifteen subjects were used. Their ages ranged from 19 to 42. All were native speakers of English.

3.3 Materials

The three "materials" used were as follows:

The first was an animated film produced by the National Film Board of Canada entitled "The Spring and Fall of Nina Polanski." The film had musical accompaniment but no dialogue. This film was 5 minutes and 56 seconds in length.

Secondly, there was a confederate. (An individual who listened to the oral descriptions given by subjects).

The last was an importance judgement sheet, which consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of a breakdown of the content of the film – that is, all the events, and all descriptions of scenery etc. In total, part one of the importance judgement sheet contained 52 events and 15 single- proposition descriptions. The second part consisted of eight statements that were either summaries of event sequences or evaluative comments created by the experimenter. The first category was included to accommodate general as opposed to specific reporting of the events in the film. The second category was included so that subjects would have an opportunity to rate the importance of inferences that were likely to be made after having viewed the film.[1]

The methodology for recording the events of the film followed Tomlin (1985). Accordingly, an event was defined as the total action occurring between event boundaries, where event boundary is defined as "the loci of abrupt visual change" in the film. Abrupt visual change, in turn, was operationalized in terms of two types of breakpoint. The first of these is a video cut, where the film shifts from one visual image to another. An example of this is one in which the scene

[1]The importance judgement sheet and the accompanying instructions can be found in Appendix B.

of Nina cutting carrots shifts to a scene where she is mixing food in a bowl.

However, some video cuts involve only a change of focus. For example, the 24 second event of Nina walking through the garden actually contains three video cuts. However, the shift is not from one image to a new image, only a shift from an image of the character leaving the frame, and then at the cut, entering the frame again. Yet, all details, with the exception of this shift in focus, remain the same. The same character is present, she is in the same location and she is continuing with the same activity. Hence, video cuts of this nature were not counted as event boundaries.

This decision is not an arbitrary whim of the experimenter. Anecdotal and empirical evidence seem to support the view that this decision is psychologically motivated. First of all, upon viewing the film and trying to separate it into its component events, I found that those video cuts involving only a change of focus were perceptually different from those involving a change from one scene to another. It seemed intuitively plausible that if I were asked to report the garden scene in detail, I would remember only that the character was walking through the garden picking petals off a flower. It seemed unlikely that I would recall that she entered the frame on three separate occasions. Furthermore, empirical evidence from Carroll and Bever (1976) supports this intuition. They found that upon viewing a film, "a video cut alone, without a change in the action portrayed (did) not have a significant cognitive effect" (Chafe, 1980, p. xiii).

The second type of breakpoint is the loss or gain of characters. An example of this type of breakpoint occurs in a scene in which the baby suddenly appears in the dishwater.

The decisions to consider an event as the total action occurring between two

event boundaries and to deem event boundaries as the loci of abrupt visual change are also psychologically motivated. In studying the way in which human beings perceive continuous action, D.A. Newtson and his colleagues (Newtson, 1973; Newtson & Engquist, 1976; Newtson, Engquist and Bois, 1977) reported three major findings pertinent to this analysis. First of all, it was discovered that subjects perceived continuous action as a series of discrete events. Secondly, subjects decided that one event had finished and the next had begun by noting changes, or breakpoints in the flow of activity, where the more dramatic the change, the more certain the event. Finally, it was found that subjects parsed the flow of activity in very similar and even identical ways.

Determining which *descriptions* should be included in the propositionalized account was not so straightforward. In order to do this, transcripts describing this film from a previous study were obtained (Derwing, 1987). Certain descriptions were found to be repeated relatively consistently; and these were included in the present breakdown.

Finally, for part one, a scale of 1 – 5 was present under each description or event, where 1 corresponded to *not important* and 5 to *very important*. For part two, the scale was located across from each statement. The same verbal descriptions were applicable to the scale.

Admittedly, it is very difficult to objectively propositionalize the content of a film. As noted above, arriving at a breakdown of all the events that comprised the film was essentially straightforward. However, what was especially problematic was deciding which descriptions should be included. Because of this problem, there is the danger that the propositionalized account was neither comprehensive, nor psychologically real with respect to every individual. However, the chief purpose of this study was to discover whether or not a

morphosyntactic marker correlated with important information. To do this, one had to be certain that given clauses were really viewed as important. To date, the conclusions of all studies that find support for the notion that information level is marked are suspect, since the methodologies did not provide a way to accurately identify clauses containing important information. Thus, this methodology allowed accurate identification of important clauses. So, while the breakdown may not have been comprehensive, at least it allowed for accurate identification.

3.4 Procedure

First of all each subject was asked to view the film in a room alone.

Secondly, each subject provided an oral description of the film to the confederate.[2] That is, s/he was asked to tell an outsider about the film, with the assumption that this person knew nothing about the content thereof.

Thirdly, all descriptions were taped and subsequently transcribed in standard English orthography.

Finally, each subject was asked to complete the importance judgements. For part one, the scale was defined, and each subject was instructed to read through all the items and assign a 1 to the item s/he thought was least important, and a 5 to the item s/he thought was most important. This anchored the scale. The rest of the judgements were then made. Subjects were instructed that the numbers 1 and 5 could be used again in the remaining judgements.

The instructions for part two were virtually identical, except that subjects were instructed not to anchor the scale by finding a least and most important statement. Furthermore, they were advised not to feel compelled to use all of the

[2]These oral descriptions can be found in Appendix C.

numbers in the scale, and to feel free to rate every statement with the same number if they felt that such an assignment were justified.

Finally, subjects were instructed not to rate items in two instances – in the case of events, if they could not remember the event having taken place, and in the case of descriptions, if they either did not remember the description or disagreed with the content of it.

3.5 Scoring

First of all, for Hypothesis 1, the verbs in each clause on the event line were examined to determine whether or not they were part of a dependent or a main predicate.

Secondly, for Hypothesis 2, the verbs in clauses that had been assigned a rating for relative importance were examined to see whether or not they were part of a dependent or main predicate. However, it can be seen that the type of results obtained would greatly depend on how the notions of *on the event line* and *dependence*, were defined. Hence, a discussion of definitions used in the study and the accompanying rationale for choosing them will now follow.

3.5.1 Identification of Clauses

All clauses containing predicates were isolated in each narrative. Definitions for identifying clauses followed from Givon (1983). Clauses were seen as being one of three types – those exhibiting subject + predicate, zero anaphora, or ellipsis. An example of a clause containing a subject and a predicate is, *She's in a wedding gown.* One exemplifying zero anaphora is, *She was picking petals off a flower and [ ] tossing them aside.* Finally, an example of

an elliptical clause is, *We see them cutting the cake and [ ] drinking wine.*

However, certain structures that would normally be considered predicates were not counted as being predicates. There are two cases where this occurred. First of all, the phrases *you know* and *I guess* seemed to behave as conversational fillers. These were not counted as predicates. Neither were repeated predicates counted. Thus, in a narrative in which a predicate was cited more than once, the first predicate was counted while the remaining one(s) was not. Thus, for each narrative, a total number of predicates was obtained.

3.5.2 Identification of Dependent Predicates

As pointed out by Tomlin (1985) and Thompson (1987), though the identification of dependent and independent clauses is not without controversy, a system based on traditional linguistic analysis can easily be used. In this study, the employed criteria were those that both Tomlin and Thompson used. That is, a predicate was viewed as being part of a dependent clause if it was a complement to another predicate, if it was in a relative clause, if it began with a conjunction marking it as an adverbial clause or if it was non-finite. A further breakdown of the range of non-finite verbs was found in Quirk and Greenbaum (1973). All predicates not identified as being dependent were counted as independent.

3.5.3 Identification of Predicates on the Event Line

Predicates on the event line of each narrative were counted. In any narrative, amidst descriptions of characters or scenery and evaluative comments that the narrator may make, there are the actual events that occur in the story. Very generally, actions on the event line are those which make up the

story, or serve to carry it forward. However, narratives are also based on the notion of temporal sequence. In fact, "the sequence in which events are told matches the sequence in which the events actually happened" (Grimes, 1975, p. 34). Thus, in most studies that investigate narratives for the presence of an event line, the above notion of temporal sequence is used to identify the event line. For example, Thompson (1987) identified the event line in the narratives she studied by determining which predicates named an event that followed the previous sequenced event and preceded the following sequenced event. Hence, an event that occurred simultaneously with another event would not be counted as part of the event line.

However, such a criterion was not necessary in this study, because the actual events of the film were already known and recorded. Thus, in this study, a predicate was counted as part of the event line if it described an event that actually took place or was perceived to have taken place in the film. Thus, events describing cinematic techniques constituted part of the event line since these events actually took place in the film. Some examples of these are, *They zoom in on her head*, and *the movie switches from movie to stills.*

However, as Thompson suggests, even with the establishment of straightforward criteria, cases arise in which it is difficult to apply them. For example, it is possible to encounter predicates which at first blush seem to be part of the event line of the narrative. However, on closer inspection, it becomes obvious that they are *summaries* of event sequences. These summaries are of two types. In the first instance, a predicate may be recapulative. That is, it sums up some events that have recently occurred in the narrative. For example, in the forthcoming study, one narrative contained the sentence, *But anyway, she's doing that.* Taken out of context, it would seem that such a sentence would be

part of the event line. However, when we examine the preceding sentences, it becomes clear that the verb *doing* is recapitulative. Following is the section of the narrative that contains both the preceding sentences and sentence containing the verb that summarizes the events in these preceding sentences:

> First of all, she's *carrying* a laundry basket, obviously full of baby things, and, uh – then she, then she *does* a lot of ironing, which seems to be ridiculous to me because she has to uh- she. . . it looks like she's ironing towels, which seems to be needless. But anyway, she's *doing* that.

Conversely, in the second case, the predicate summarizes by anticipating the event sequence. In the forthcoming study, one narrative contained the sentence *Starts doing other chores*. Again, taken out of context, it would seem that such a sentence should be part of the event line. However, consider the sentences that follow it. These are, *Let's see. . . cooking, chopping a carrot*. Clearly, the verb *doing* is a general one that anticipates the specific verbs of *cooking* and *chopping*. Thus, examples of this nature were not counted as being on the event line.

Included below is a passage coded for *on/off the event line* and clause type. Predicates on the event line are underlined and dependent predicates are italicized. Predicates that are both dependent *and* on the event line are italicized and underlined. Notice that the sample narrative contains examples of repeated predicates, anticipatory predicates, and predicates describing cinematic techniques.

> Well, what it *starts* off with is a relatively young lady <u>*walking*</u> through the woods. And it's pretty well springtime. There's a lot of leaves <u>*falling*</u> around her, but they're pretty well in blossom. And uh...the camera

pretty well centers in on her face, and all of a sudden it pulls back and she's at a wedding reception – it's her wedding. And you see relatives there, and *cutting* the cake, and so on. Then she's in a house. And pretty well what *happens* in the house is..is..she's washing a few dishes, cleaning clothes, basically doing all sorts of chores, and a kid appears as – out of the water as she's washing dishes, the first kid. And then uh...she walks by this fridge and then the fridge becomes attached to her, becomes part of her as she's *walking* to the stove and *starts stirring up* some food. And, then she moves her back a bit, the stove's part of her now also. And two little kids appear, so she has three kids now. She's sitting at the table and giving them their lunches for them *to go* to school and she walks away. And it's the table, fridge and the stove are all attached to her. The school bus pulls out. You see this from the window. And as it's gone, you see she *walks*. First the table drops off, then the stove drops off, and the fridge drops off of her. And she walks – she walks out back into these woods and she's still wearing her apron and so on. 'Cept the difference is now she *sits* on the same rock she *was sitting* on before, and there's leaves *falling*. Except it's all fall. The trees all look pretty dead as they *are* towards winter. Leaves falling everywhere.

L: Yeah.

S: And that's the film. Very short film.

An arbitrarily picked narrative was coded for *on/off the event line* and clause type by another rater. The narrative was assumed to be representative of the fifteen in the set. When results of the two raters were compared, interrater agreement was found to be 94%.

3.5.4. The Matching of Clause Type and Relative Importance

First of all, a given subject's importance judgement sheet, which contained the propositionalized account of the film, and his or her oral description were examined. Predicates in clauses were matched up with items that were rated on the importance judgement sheet. For example, one narrative contained the sentence, *Okay, there was a young woman.* Looking on the importance

judgement sheet, I found that the subject had rated the item *She is young* as being very important. The subject had chosen a *5*. Hence, the predicate in the oral description was assigned a *5*. This match-up process was repeated in the narrative until all eligible predicates received a rating.

Clearly, the match-up between a given oral description and the items on the importance judgement sheet was neither expected nor shown to be perfect, in that it was assumed that it would be unlikely that a subject would report every item present on the propositionalized account. However, as stated earlier, this was not problematic in light of the main goal of the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Statistical tests were conducted to evaluate the experimental data. In this chapter, the results of the statistical tests are reported, and the hypotheses evaluated. Furthermore, the results will be discussed in reference to the requirements for testing for correlations between morphosyntactic markers and information type outlined in Chapter 2.

4.2 Evaluation of Hypothesis 1

Some previous research has suggested that certain morphosyntactic markers co-occur with information on or off the event line of a narrative. In particular, with regards to the morphosyntactic marker examined in this study, it is claimed that main clauses co-occur with information on the event line, while dependent clauses co-occur with information off of it (Labov & Waletzky 1967; Hopper 1979; Thompson 1987; Reinhart in press).

As indicated in Chapter 3, both material on the event line and dependent predicates were identified so that a correlation between clause and information type could be checked for. Table 1 contains the raw data showing how many dependent predicates occurred on and off the event line of each narrative. Table 2 shows how many main predicates fell into the same two categories.

Table 3 shows the percentage of dependent and main predicates contained in each narrative. Notice that, with the exception of subject five, all narratives contained more main predicates than dependent predicates. Furthermore, when these figures are pooled, in an average narrative, 27.5% of predicates are

Table 1 — Number of Dependent Predicates on and off the Event Line

Subjects	On	Off	Total
1	7	22	29
2	5	15	20
3	5	12	17
4	10	25	35
5	16	9	25
6	6	11	17
7	9	6	15
8	5	16	21
9	4	4	8
10	4	19	23
11	4	4	8
12	3	11	14
13	4	4	8
14	11	3	14
15	10	9	19

dependent, and 72.5% of them are main. Furthermore, in general, the low percentage of dependent predicates was relatively consistent across narratives as indicated by the low standard deviation. (S.D. = 12.535).

In order to evaluate Hypothesis 1, each narrative had to be normalized for predicate type. The importance of this will be illustrated in the following example. Consider the data from subject one. Out of a total of 29 dependent predicates used, 22 (76%) of them were off the event line, and 7 (24%) of them were on the event line. Hence, our first intuition might be to suspect that dependent predicates correlate with information off the event line, just as Hypothesis 1 suggests. However, it is imperative that we also take into account the number of *main* predicates on and off the event line. This information is

Table 2 — Number of Main Predicates on and off the Event Line

Subjects	On	Off	Total
1	29	44	73
2	13	15	28
3	31	38	69
4	14	27	41
5	1	19	20
6	19	33	52
7	17	20	37
8	25	40	65
9	13	27	40
10	18	25	43
11	24	31	55
12	26	34	60
13	38	34	72
14	22	19	41
15	25	34	59

crucial, since in order to see if *dependent* predicates correlate with information off the event line, we must consider whether *main* predicates correlate with information off the event line. In other words, if the percentage of *main* predicates off the event line in subject one's narrative was also 76%, we could not conclude that dependent predicates correlate with information off the event line.

Hence, in order to normalize for predicate type, in each narrative, the number of dependent clauses *off* the event line was divided by the number of dependent clauses *on* the event line. That is, figures in column two of Table 1 were divided by the figures in column one of Table 1. Similarly, the number of main predicates off the event line was divided by the number of main predicates

Table 3 — Percentage of Dependent and Main Predicates Contained in Oral Narratives

Subject	%Dependent	%Main
1	28.4	71.6
2	41.7	58.3
3	19.8	80.2
4	46.1	53.9
5	55.6	44.4
6	24.6	75.4
7	28.8	71.2
8	24.4	75.6
9	16.7	83.3
10	34.8	65.2
11	12.7	87.3
12	18.9	81.1
13	10.0	90.0
14	25.5	74.5
15	24.4	75.6
Mean	27.5	72.5
S.D.	12.535	12.535

on the event line. That is, the figures in column two of Table 2 were divided by the figures in column one of Table 2. Hence, a ratio was obtained for each narrative in each category. These ratios were entered in Table 4.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that *dependent* predicates correlate with information off the event line, and that *main* predicates correlate with information on the event line. In terms of actual data, this means that the ratios in column one of Table 4 should be significantly larger than the ratios in column two.

The first step conducted was a sign test to determine how many differences conformed to the direction of the hypothesis. Of the 15 ratios in column one, 9

Table 4 — Ratios of Dependent and Main Predicates

Subject	Ratio Off/On Dependent	Ratio Off/On Main	Col 1 – Col 2
1	3.14	1.51	+1.63
2	3.00	1.15	+1.85
3	2.40	1.23	+1.17
4	2.50	1.93	+0.57
5	0.56	19.00	-18.44
6	1.83	1.74	+0.09
7	0.67	1.18	-0.51
8	3.20	1.60	+1.60
9	1.00	2.08	-1.08
10	4.75	1.38	+3.37
11	1.00	1.29	-0.29
12	3.67	1.31	+2.36
13	1.00	0.89	+0.11
14	0.27	0.86	-0.59
15	0.90	1.36	-0.46

were larger than the ratios in column two, and 6 were smaller than the ratios in column two. This indicates a weak trend in the direction of the hypothesis.

This hypothesis was then evaluated with a one-tailed correlated means t-test. As shown in Table 5, there was no significant difference between the ratios of dependent predicates and the ratios of main predicates $t(14) = -.44$, $p > .05$. Based on the results of this portion of the study, we cannot conclude that clause type correlates with *on/off the event line*, and thus no support is shown for Hypothesis 1.

Table 5 — t-test on Ratios of Dependent and Main Predicates

N	Mean	St. Deviation	SE Mean	T	P value
15	-0.57	5.10	1.32	-0.44	0.34

0.34 > .05

4.2.1 Discussion of the results

These results are at odds with the claims made by Labov and Waletzky (1967), Hopper (1979), Thompson (1987) and Reinhart (in press). How then are we to interpret these results? Certainly, they may cast some doubt on the conclusions drawn by the above-mentioned linguists. This interpretation seems reasonable when we consider that out of the four studies mentioned, only Thompson (1987) investigated the claims empirically. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the conclusions of Thompson's study are suspect for at least two reasons. First of all, she did not normalize for predicate type. Because of this, the findings are essentially meaningless. Secondly, she investigated only two narratives in searching for correlations between clause type and *on/off the event line*. Clearly, results obtained from such a small data pool are of limited generalizability.

However, it possible that some factor in the experiment itself caused the trend to fall short of significance. In light of this assumption, the nature of the narratives analyzed warrants further discussion. Consider again what Hypothesis1 predicts – that of the predicates on the event line, the majority of them will be main and vice versa. However, this clearly was not the case in the narratives analyzed in this study. Many predicates on the event line were

dependent rather than main ones. For example, consider subject five. In this subject's narrative, out of the 17 predicates on the event line, 16 of them were dependent. However, one reason for this *may* lie in the nature of the narrative itself. The narratives in this study were oral descriptions of a film (the oral equivalents of a non-linguistic story). Hence, because the story was contained in a film, some subjects had a tendency to relay the information with constructions that would be peculiar to this type of situation. Two of these constructions are *it shows her* and *we see her*. Again, these constructions are present in the narrative of subject five. In this case, instead of relaying a subset of the actions on the event line by saying, *She got married to a man. She exchanged vows and she threw the bouquet*, the subject relayed them by saying, *Then it shows her getting married to a man, and it shows a scene at the wedding exchanging vows and. . .um. . . throwing the bouquet.* In the first example, the verbs "to get," "to exchange" and "to throw" are all main predicates. In the second example, they are dependent predicates by virtue of the fact that they are embedded in the *show* clause. In fact, out of the 16 dependent predicates on the event line of this narrative, 9 followed the construction *it shows her*. Hence, if subjects had not been describing a film, these film-specific constructions such as *it shows her* and *we see her* would not have been used. Thus, perhaps the event line of any given narrative would not have contained so many dependent predicates. In short, these film-specific constructions may be confounding the data.

By this suggestion, I do not mean to imply that a method that uses films to elicit narratives is not a valid one. In fact, I would argue that such narratives are quite natural in view of the cinema-literate culture that we live in. It is not an

uncommon occurrence for an individual to relate the contents of a film or television show to another individual who has not seen the production in question.

However, Hypothesis 1 clearly warrants further investigation. In future work, when examining oral narratives that are elicited after viewing visual narratives, perhaps dependent predicates following film-particular comments could be either discounted or treated as main predicates. However, neither solution is completely satisfactory. The first solution is problematic because such a method would reduce the number of predicates that could be analyzed, which is potentially problematic in short narratives. The second solution is problematic because there is something contrived about treating a dependent predicate as if it were not one.

In summary, the results from this portion of the study do not support claims about the relation of clause type to event line made in the literature.

4.3 Evaluation of Hypothesis 2

In contrast to the literature that assumes the existence of a co-occurrence between specific morphosyntactic markers and *on/off the event line*, there is also a body of work characterized by the belief that certain morphosyntactic markers co-occur with relative importance. In particular, it is claimed that main clauses co-occur with more important information, while dependent clauses co-occur with less important information (Townsend & Bever 1977; Talmy 1978; Tomlin 1985).

As outlined in Chapter 3, predicates from oral descriptions were matched up with the appropriate rated items on the importance judgement sheet. After this task was completed, a total number of rated predicates for each narrative was

arrived at. This raw data is shown in Table 6.

Table 6 — Number of Predicates Rated for Importance in Oral Narratives

Subject	Subordinate	Main	Total
1	7	32	39
2	9	8	17
3	2	18	20
4	6	15	21
5	10	5	15
6	8	14	22
7	3	18	21
8	4	15	19
9	4	15	19
10	5	20	25
11	4	23	27
12	2	20	22
13	3	25	28
14	9	20	29
15	9	19	28

Notice that the total number of dependent and main predicates rated is smaller than the total number of predicates contained in each narrative. In fact, as seen in Table 7, only 34.9% (roughly one third) of all clauses present in the narratives could be rated. This occurred for three reasons. First of all, many predicates off the event line of the narratives consisted of evaluative comments. These comments include statements such as, *I don't know why she was doing that. That was really odd*, etc. Clearly, items such as these could not be assigned an importance rating since they did not correspond to any items on the

Table 7 — Percentage of Predicates that were Rated for Importance in Oral Narratives

Subject	% Rated
1	35.3
2	35.4
3	23.4
4	27.6
5	33.3
6	31.9
7	40.4
8	22.1
9	39.6
10	37.9
11	42.9
12	29.7
13	35.0
14	52.7
15	35.9
Mean	**34.9**
S.D.	**7.72**

importance judgement sheet. Secondly, subjects sometimes described things that were not included on the importance judgement sheet. Hence, predicates in these clauses could not be assigned an importance rating. Finally, due to memory distortions, the remembered and reported events in a given narrative were not always the actual events that occurred in the film. Clearly, predicates in these types of clauses did not correspond to any rated events on the importance judgement sheet.

However, even though the actual number of predicates is smaller, the

proportion of subordinate to main predicates is virtually identical, as can be seen in Table 8. Remember that in Table 3, the mean percentage of dependent predicates used in the narratives was 27.5. In Table 8, the mean percentage is 25.8. Similarly, in Table 3, the mean percentage of main predicates was 72.5, while the mean percentage in Table 8 is 74.2. However, the percentages in Table 8 display greater variability than the predicates in Table 3, as indicated by the higher standard deviation. (S.D.= 16.34)

Table 8 — Percentage of Rated Dependent and Main Predicates in Oral Narratives

Subject	%Dependent	%Main
1	17.9	82.1
2	52.9	47.1
3	10.0	90.0
4	28.6	71.4
5	66.7	33.3
6	36.4	63.6
7	14.3	85.7
8	21.1	78.9
9	21.1	78.9
10	20.0	80.0
11	14.8	85.2
12	9.1	90.9
13	10.7	89.3
14	31.0	69.0
15	32.1	67.9
Mean	**25.8**	**74.2**
S.D.	**16.34**	**16.34**

After discovering the ratings assigned to each predicate, the mean rating for all dependent and main predicates in each narrative was computed. These figures are shown in Table 9.

Table 9 — Mean Importance Ratings of Main and Dependent Predicates

Subject	Mean Main	Mean Dependent	Col 1 – Col 2
1	3.13	2.71	+0.42
2	4.13	4.44	-0.31
3	3.72	3.00	+0.72
4	4.13	4.16	-0.03
5	4.20	4.50	-0.30
6	3.07	3.00	+0.07
7	4.00	3.67	+0.33
8	4.33	4.00	+0.33
9	3.73	4.25	-0.52
10	4.20	3.80	+0.40
11	3.91	3.75	+0.16
12	3.95	4.00	-0.05
13	3.44	3.00	+0.44
14	4.15	3.89	+0.26
15	3.95	4.11	-0.16

At this point, we must consider how this data relates to Hypothesis 2. This hypothesis predicts that main predicates correlate with more important information, while dependent predicates correlate with less important information. As this statement applies to Table 9, the hypothesis predicts that the means in column one (the mean importance rating of main predicates) should be significantly larger than the means in column two (the mean importance rating of dependent predicates).

Firstly, the first step of a sign test was conducted to determine how many of the differences conformed to the direction of the hypothesis. Of the 15 means in column one, 9 were larger than the means in column two, while 6 were smaller than the means in column two. This indicates a weak trend in the direction of the hypothesis.

Next, a one-tailed correlated means t-test was conducted. As shown in Table 10, there was no significant difference between the means of the main predicates and the means of the dependent predicates. However, a trend that fell short of significance was shown $t(14) = 1.33$, $p > .05$.

Table 10 — t-test on Means of Main and Dependent Predicates

N	Mean	St. Deviation	SE Mean	T	P value
15	0.117	0.343	0.089	1.33	0.11

0.11 > .05

It was at this point that a potential problem was noted with the scale of importance that was used to rate items in the film. The verbal descriptions corresponding to each *end* of the scale were clear. A rating of 5 meant – *very important; crucial to the understanding of the film.* A rating of 4 meant – *quite important, but not as important as 5.* Analogously, at the other end of the scale, a rating of 1 stood for *unimportant,* while a rating of 2 stood for *relatively unimportant.* However, the problem lay in the verbal description of 3, and how it consequently may have been interpreted. A rating of 3 meant – *uncertain as to level of importance; cannot decide.* It is unclear how subjects actually used this

rating. One possibility is that they may have treated 3 as being in the middle of the scale. Thus, instead of interpreting 3 to mean *cannot decide*, they may have interpreted it to mean *less important than 4, but more important than 2*. A second possibility is that subjects interpreted 3 to mean *cannot decide*. In this case, predicates rated as 3 would offer no information about perceived importance, since subjects who used this rating failed to commit themselves to a decision about relative importance. In such a case, the ratings of 3 should be thrown out.

The importance ratings patterns of some of the subjects seem to reflect this. 33% of subjects did not use the score of 3 in their ratings. 27% of subjects used the rating only one or two times. However, three subjects used the rating of 3 more than any other rating in the scale. Hence, because of the potentially ambiguous meaning of 3, and because a choice of 3 in fact amounts to no choice at all, the ratings of 3 in all narratives were thrown out.

With these figures removed from the scale, the mean ratings for all dependent and main predicates were recalculated. These figures are shown in Table 11. Remember that Hypothesis 2 predicts that the means in column one of Table 11 should be significantly larger than the means in column two of Table 11.

Once again, the first step of a sign test was conducted to determine how many differences conformed to the direction of the hypothesis. This time, of the figures in column one 12 were larger than the means in column two, while only 3 were smaller than the means of column two, indicative of a clear trend in the direction of the hypothesis. Again, a one-tailed correlated means t-test was conducted to evaluate Hypothesis 2. As shown in Table 12, the difference

Table 11- Mean Importance Ratings of Main and Dependent Predicates — No Middle Rating

Subject	Mean Main	Mean Dependent	Col 1 – Col 2
1	3.13	2.71	+0.42
2	4.50	4.44	+0.06
3	4.30	3.00	+1.30
4	4.13	4.16	-0.03
5	4.50	4.71	-0.21
6	3.07	3.00	+0.07
7	4.29	3.67	+0.62
8	4.33	4.00	+0.33
9	3.79	4.25	-0.46
10	4.60	4.00	+0.60
11	3.91	3.75	+0.16
12	4.27	4.00	+0.27
13	3.69	3.00	+0.69
14	4.28	4.00	+0.28
15	4.50	4.43	+0.0

Table 12 — t-test on Means of Main and Dependent Predicates — No Middle Rating

N	Mean	St. Deviation	SE Mean	T	P value
15	0.278	0.421	0.109	2.56	*0.01

*0.01 < .05

between the means in the two columns was highly significant t (14) = 2.56, p < .025, providing evidence in support of Hypothesis 2.

4.3.1 Discussion of the Results

These results are in accord with Townsend and Bever (1977), Talmy (1978) and Tomlin (1985). However, it should be noted that claims about the relationship between morphosyntactic markers and relative importance made in the literature are much stronger than the ones made in this study. For example, Tomlin (1985) claims that main clauses correlate with foreground information and subordinate clauses with background information. Accordingly, foreground and background information are operationalized as being + and – significant respectively. However, elsewhere in Tomlin's study, and indeed in all discussions of the characteristics of foreground and background information, importance or significance is viewed as a *relative* notion. That is, certain clauses are seen as being either more or less central to a particular discourse theme. This latter view seems to be the intuitively plausible one.

Such a view is supported by the results of this study. That is, the importance ratings of main predicates were shown to be significantly higher than the importance ratings of dependent predicates. However, as can be seen in Table 11, the ratings in *both* columns are primarily equal to or greater than 3, which is the middle of the scale. (The lowest rating in either column is 2.71). Hence, the view that clause type correlates with *relative* importance is supported. In short, the results support the claim in Hypothesis 2.

However, the results must be interpreted with a measure of caution, since

even though the t- value in the t-test with the importance judgements of 3 deleted was highly significant, the t-value in the t-test which included all the importance judgements fell short of significance. Yet, it seems reasonable to question the results of the first t-test because of the problem with the rating scale. However, even if it can be argued that the results of this t-test should be discounted, I would still recommend that Hypothesis 2 be further investigated.

In future studies where subjects rate relative importance, it might be useful to employ a scale that forces subjects to choose between important and non-important items. A scale with an even number of ratings would facilitate such a process. At the very least, if a scale that contained an odd number of ratings *were* used, the middle rating should clearly correspond to the notion of *in the middle of the scale*, and not to *cannot decide*.

Considerations about rating scales aside, it is imperative that any subsequent work allow for individual determination of importance in the way that this study did. To reiterate the arguments found in Chapter 2 very simply – failure to do this will result in an essentially arbitrary assignment of important and non-important information. Consequently, one could not evaluate a hypothesis investigating the relation of form and function.

In summary, the results of this portion of the study support claims made in the literature about the relation between clause type and relative importance.

4.4 Evaluation of Hypothesis 3

Certain linguists have proposed that in some languages, the most important events on the event line of a narrative are overtly marked (Walrod 1977; Machin 1977). However, this claim has never been investigated empirically.

In order to test the claim in Hypothesis 3, some preliminary steps were

taken. Before proceeding with a discussion of these however, it is important to note that with respect to the two parameters of importance and *on/off the event line*, there exists the potential for four categories of main predicates to be present in each narrative. First of all, with respect to main predicates on the event line, there are two categories: predicates that are on the event line and *important*, and predicates that are on the event line and *not* important. Secondly, with respect to main predicates *off* the event line, two analogous categories occur: that is, predicates that are off the event line and *important*, and predicates that are off the event line and *not* important.[3] Clearly, these same four categories are also possible for dependent predicates.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that the proportion of *main* predicates denoting important events on the event line will be greater than the proportion of *dependent* predicates denoting important events on the event line. The first step in testing this claim involved isolating all main predicates that were *important* and *on* the event line in each narrative. This figure was then divided by the total number of rated main predicates (that is, the total of the four categories mentioned above). Thus, a percentage for *important main predicates on the event line* was obtained for each narrative. These percentages and the raw data from which they were derived can be seen in Table 13.

The same process was repeated for the dependent predicates. That is, in each narrative, all dependent predicates that were important and *on the event line* were counted. This figure was divided by the total number of rated dependent predicates to arrive at a percentage for *important dependent predicates on the event line*. Thus, percentages for each narrative were obtained. These

---

[3]Importance is treated as a binary notion in this portion of the experiment because certain of these categories contained no rated predicates from which a mean could be obtained.

Table 13 — Number and Percentage of Main Predicates that are both On Event Line and Important

Subject	#On/Imp	Total Main	%On/Imp
1	9	32	28
2	5	6	83
3	7	10	70
4	7	15	47
5	1	4	25
6	6	14	43
7	8	14	57
8	10	15	67
9	5	14	36
10	7	15	47
11	13	23	57
12	8	15	53
13	7	16	44
14	14	18	78
15	9	12	75

percentages and the raw data from which they were derived were entered in Table 14.

Finally, the percentages from Tables 13 and 14 were entered into columns one and two respectively of Table 15. At this point, Hypothesis 3 was ready to be evaluated. Note again what it predicts: that the proportion of *main* predicates denoting important events on the event line will be greater than the proportion of *dependent* predicates denoting important events on the event line. In terms of actual data, this means that the percentages in column one of Table 15 should be significantly larger than the percentages in column two.

The first step of a sign test was conducted to determine how many differences conformed to the direction of the hypothesis. Of the 15 figures in column one, 6

Table 14 — Number and Percentage of Dependent Predicates that are both On Event Line and Important

Subject	#On/Imp	Total Main	%On/Imp
1	3	7	43
2	5	9	56
3	0	2	0
4	6	6	100
5	9	9	100
6	2	8	25
7	3	3	100
8	3	4	75
9	3	4	75
10	3	4	75
11	1	4	25
12	1	2	50
13	1	2	50
14	7	8	88
15	2	7	29

were larger than the figures in column two, while 9 were smaller than the figures in column 2. This indicates that, while there is a weak trend, it is in the opposite direction of the one predicted by the hypothesis. Next, a one-tailed correlated means t-test was conducted to evaluate this hypothesis. As can be seen in Table 16, the results of this test were not significant $T(14) = -.53$, $p > .05$. This result is not surprising in view of the results of the sign test. Thus, no support was shown for Hypothesis 3.

Table 15 — Percentages of Important Main Predicates on Event Line and Important Dependent Predicates On Event Line

Subject	%Main/On/Imp	%Dep/On/Imp	Col 1 – Col 2
1	28	43	-15
2	83	56	+27
3	70	0	+70
4	47	100	-53
5	25	100	-75
6	43	25	+18
7	57	100	-43
8	67	75	-8
9	36	75	-39
10	47	75	-28
11	57	25	+32
12	53	50	+3
13	44	50	-6
14	78	88	-10
15	75	29	+46
Mean of Difference			-5.4

Table 16 — t-test on Percentages of Important Main Predicates on Event line and Important Dependent Predicates on Event Line

N	Mean	St. Deviation	SE Mean	T	P value
15	-5.4	39.3	10.2	-0.53	0.61

0.61 > .05

4.4.1 Discussion of the Results

Although the results of the t-test did not support Hypothesis 3, it should be pointed out that these results may not be valid since, as mentioned in footnote 3 on page 84, and as seen in Table 17 below, certain categories which comprised the total number of rated dependent predicates contained no members. In particular, there were no *unimportant dependent predicates off the event line* in 14 out of 15 subjects. The fact that there were no figures in this category may be confounding the results because their absence lowers the *overall* number of rated dependent predicates, and thus increases the percentage of dependent predicates that are important and on the event line. Because of this, the results of the t-test may not be valid.

However, it seems reasonable to wonder why this category lacked information. After examining the narratives elicited in this study, three reasons emerge that account for this phenomenon. First of all, as seen earlier in this chapter, dependent predicates are relatively rare. This fact decreased the chance that any given dependent predicate could be rated.

On top of this, material *off* the event line was less likely to be rated than material *on* the event line. This occurred because some off-event line material is comprised of evaluative comments. These comments of course, cannot be anticipated, and consequently, any predicates contained in evaluative commentary could not be assigned an importance rating. In light of these explanations, it is not surprising that the incidence of rated dependent predicates off the event line was quite low.

Finally, not surprisingly, subjects tended to mention information that was rated as important. Hence, as seen in Table 18, 72% of the importance ratings assigned in all narratives were either fours or fives. Thus, this is also a

Table 17 — Breakdown of Raw Data which Comprise the Total Number of Rated Dependent Predicates

Subj	Dep/On/Imp	Dep/On/Not	Dep/Off/Imp	Dep/Off/Not	Total
1	3	3	1	0	7
2	5	1	3	0	9
3	1	0	1	0	2
4	6	0	0	0	6
5	9	0	0	0	9
6	2	3	2	1	8
7	2	1	0	0	3
8	3	1	0	0	4
9	3	1	0	0	4
10	3	1	0	0	4
11	1	1	2	0	4
12	1	0	1	0	2
13	1	1	0	0	2
14	7	1	0	0	8
15	3	0	4	0	7

contributing reason to the fact that the category of *unimportant dependent predicates off the event line* was virtually empty.

However, it is not clear how such a problem could be avoided in future studies. First of all, in a functional perspective of language, it is assumed that the essential purpose of language is communication. The purpose of narratives as a subset of language would be the same. People tell stories to other people. Hence, in any functional study, it is imperative that this basic motivation of communication not be removed. That is, elicited narratives, whether oral or written, should be told in conditions that simulate as closely as possible natural discourse situations. Because of this requirement, it is difficult to control for the

Table 18 — Percentage of Predicates in Oral Narratives Assigned Importance Ratings of Four or Five

Subject	% Rated
1	58
2	82
3	50
4	95
5	85
6	55
7	76
8	84
9	68
10	68
11	78
12	73
13	52
14	90
15	71
Mean	72

types and frequencies of linguistic forms that will occur in given narratives.

Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 2, it is crucial that the individuals who produce the narratives are the same individuals who make decisions about the relative importance of events and descriptions contained therein. Hence, when using a non-linguistic device (a film) to elicit importance judgements, it is not clear how elements not contained in the film, but contained in the subsequently produced narrative (i.e. evaluative comments) could be rated.

Yet, using such a non-linguistic task is essential in order to ensure that linguistic forms and extralinguistic notions such as importance are identified

independently of one another. As indicated in Chapter 2, failure to do this results in circularity.

Because of the above-mentioned constraints, any study that planned to investigate Hypothesis 3 would have to draw on a large data base. Since the length of narratives elicited under natural discourse conditions cannot be controlled for, each subject would have to produce several narratives. In this way, one could be reasonably confident that at least some clauses off the event line would receive an importance rating.

In summary, the results from this portion of the study do not support the claims in Hypothesis 3. However, this hypothesis clearly warrants further investigation in view of the fact that the absence of certain figures may have confounded the results.

4.5 The success of the study in meeting previously set out requirements

Finally, it will be useful to examine whether this study was successful in meeting the five requirements for testing for correlations between morphosyntactic markers and information type outlined in Chapter 2.

First of all, multi-subject data was used so that individual trends could be distinguished from group tendencies. That is, because multiple subjects were used, we can have more confidence in the results that supported the existence of a correlation between clause type and relative importance.

Secondly, morphosyntactic forms and extralinguistic notions were identified independently of one another. The use of the film ensured that independent identification of importance was possible.

Thirdly, the study allowed for individual determination of importance. Because of this, it was clear that given clauses in the narratives were indeed seen

as either more or less important. Hence, in the case of Hypothesis 2, it could claimed with a relative degree of certainty that correlations between form and function existed.

Fourthly, the notion of importance in this study was treated as a relative and not a discrete notion. The use of an importance rating scale allowed subjects to make judgements about the relative importance of components in the film. Furthermore, the results from the second portion of the study supported the notion that clause type correlates with relative importance.

Finally, decisions about relative importance were not restricted to events, since subjects rated all components present in the film. Hence, the judgements of subjects who deemed certain descriptions to be central to the film were accommodated. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the seasons in this film had great symbolic import. The spring represented the woman's youth; the fall represented the later years of her life. Subjects clearly felt that these seasons were crucial to the story. 80% of subjects mentioned that the film ended in the fall. Moreover, the mean importance rating assigned to this description was 5.00. That is, each subject in this group felt that this description constituted one of the most important components of the film.

A summary of the results of the experiment follows in the fifth chapter. Implications for future research are also discussed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary of the Results of the Experiment

This study tested for correlations between clause type and information type. The term information type was proposed to be an umbrella term which subsumed the two notions of relative importance and *on/off the event line*. Of these two notions, only the former was found to correlate with clause type. However, it was suggested that these results be treated with caution, since the manner in which subjects interpreted and subsequently applied the rating scale may have confounded the figures that were employed in the first t-test. In short, no firm conclusions could be drawn from this portion of the study. Hence, it was proposed that the relationship between clause type and relative importance warranted further investigation. In fact, it would be beneficial for all three hypotheses elucidated in Chapter 3 and subsequently examined in Chapter 4 to be further examined.

However, the above comments are not intended to diminish in any way the merit of this study. In actuality, the main goal of this study was not to provide conclusive evidence for the hypotheses, but rather to establish a research design that would allow the hypotheses to be accurately tested. In fact, the strength of this study lies in its methodological and theoretical innovations.

According to Tomlin (1985), "the general goal of functional linguistics is to describe and explain empirically the connections possible between syntactic forms and semantic and pragmatic functions" (Tomlin, 1985, p. 85). The crucial word in this statement is *empirically*. In the vast majority of studies to date, issues regarding the relationship of morphosyntactic markers and information

type have not been investigated empirically. When empirical research *has* been conducted, it has been flawed by theoretical and methodological weaknesses (Hopper & Thompson 1980; Tomlin 1985; Thompson 1987).

However, these studies that recognized that empirical issues demand empirical answers should be commended. Even though the studies contain flaws, they represent crucial steps in the development of a research paradigm. It is hoped that this study represents a further step in the development of such a paradigm.

5.2 Implications for Future Research

As an introduction to this section, it will be instructive to consider how the results of this study conform to the claims made in the general theory. To reiterate, this theory makes several claims. First of all, the theory holds that information type in discourse is always systematically separated, secondly, that it correlates with given morphosyntactic features with such regularity that the markers can be said to *code* information type, and finally, that this marking is universal across language.

Furthermore, according to proponents of this theory, information type is marked for two reasons. When the information type in question is relative importance, it is assumed to be marked so that listeners or readers may pay special attention to the information. When it is an event line that is marked, it is assumed that such a marking will allow the hearer or reader to pick out parts of the discourse that "are to be stored for immediate sequential processing as opposed to those parts which are to be stored for future or concomitant access" (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, p. 282).

In this study, a significant correlation was found to hold between relative

importance and the morphosyntactic marker of clause type. Is it really reasonable to assume, as the theory claims, that the morphosyntactic marker in question *codes* relative importance? In similar cases, certain linguists have been tempted to conclude exactly that. However, even the existence of perfect correlations will not ensure that a particular hearer infers what meaning is being expressed by the grammatical marker. This clearly is an empirical issue. Hence, no study to date, including this one, can claim that the morphosyntactic markers studied coded information type.

In the future, studies must investigate empirically whether grammatical markers code functional notions. A study that would allow this would be essentially the same as the one conducted here, except that it would contain an additional step. After subjects had rated the relative importance of items in a film and subsequently told the story to a listener, the listener would then retell the story. Thus, if coding really existed, the elements that the initial speaker felt were important would be communicated to the listener and thus show up as being marked for importance in the listener's retelling.

Secondly, if importance is really overtly marked, it follows that if a change in the perception of importance occurs, an analogous change would occur in the syntax of the subsequently told narrative. Hence, in the future, it would be interesting to devise a study in which, before viewing the film, subjects were given certain information that would bias them to perceive certain components of the film as being more important than others. In such an experiment, different information would be given to two groups. After having viewed the film, the members of each group would describe it. Then, the syntax of the narratives in each group would be checked to see whether appropriate clauses

contained importance markers.

Considerations about coding aside, let us consider two additional recommendations for future research in light of some other claims made in the general theory. First of all, the theory suggests that the coding of information type is not restricted to narratives, but applies to discourse in general. Clearly, other genres, such as procedural and expository discourse must be examined in order to provide evidence for this claim. This is especially important in view of the belief that narratives may have "syntactic properties of problematic generalizability to discourse in general" (Wald, 1987, p. 482).

Finally, the theory claims that the coding of information type is a language universal process. This claim needs to be substantiated with evidence of correlations between grammatical mechanisms and information type in languages other than English. The investigation of this phenomenon in non-Indo-European languages would be especially beneficial.

5.3 Conclusions

This study has provided evidence that relative importance may correlate with clause type in English oral narratives. Furthermore, the study represents a crucial step in the development of a research methodology that can accurately test for correlations between information type and grammatical mechanisms. Future research should continue in this vein, with a focus on investigating claims about coding in other discourse genres and in other languages.

REFERENCES

Bartlett, F.C. (1932) *Remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bishop, Ruth G. (1979) Tense-aspect in Totonac narrative discourse. In Linda K. Jones (ed.), *Discourse Studies in Mesoamerican Languages*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Carroll, J.M. and Bever, T.G. (1976) Segmentation in cinema and perception. *Science*, 191, p. 1053 - 1055.

Chafe, W.L. (1980) *The Pear Stories: Cognitive, cultural and linguistic aspects of narrative production*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Derwing, T. (1987) *Individual Differences in Foreigner Talk*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. University of Alberta.

Dik, S.C. (1980) *Studies in Functional Grammar*. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company.

Flik, Eva. (1978) Dan tense-aspect and discourse. In J.E. Grimes (ed.), *Papers on Discourse*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Forsyth, J. (1970) *A Grammar of Aspect: Usage and Meaning in the Russian Verb*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fox, B. (1983) The discourse function of the participle in ancient greek. In F. Klein-Andreu (ed.), *Discourse: Perspectives on Syntax*. New York: Academic Press.

Givón, T. (1979) From discourse to syntax: grammar as a processing strategy. In T. Givon (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics: Discourse and Syntax, Volume 12*. New York: Academic Press.

Givon, T. (1983) *Topic Continuity in Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Gleason, H.A. (1968) Contrastive analysis in discourse structure. In J. Atlis (ed.), *Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics*. 19th Annual Round Table. 21, 39-64. Washington: Georgetown University Press.

Grimes, J.E. (1968) *The Thread of Discourse*. Pre-publication draft.

Grimes, J.E. and Glock, N. (1970) A Saramaccan narrative pattern. *Language*, 46, 408-425.

Grimes, J.E. (1975) *The Thread of Discourse*. Paris: The Hague.

Hale, Austin. (1973) Toward the systematization of display grammar. In Irvine Davis (ed.), *Clause, Sentence and Discourse Patterns in Selected Languages of Nepal*. Part 1. Norman, Oklahoma: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Harries, L. (1965) *Swahili Prose Texts*. London: Oxford University Press.

Hopper, P.J. (1979) Aspect and foregrounding in discourse. In T. Givon (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics: Discourse and Syntax, Volume 12*. New York: Academic Press.

Hopper, P.J. (1982) Aspect between discourse and grammar: an introductory essay for the volume. In P. Hopper (ed.), Tense-Aspect: Between Semantics and Pragmatics. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Hopper, P.J. and Thompson, S. (1980) Transitivity in grammar and discourse. *Language*, 56, 251-299.

Howard, Olive M. (1978) The paragraph in Gagou (Gban) narrative. In Joseph E. Grimes (ed.), *Papers on Discourse*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Jones, L. and Jones, L. (1979) Multiple levels of information in discourse. In L. Jones (ed.), *Discourse Studies in Mesoamerican Languages: Discussion*. Arlington, Texas: Summer Institute of Linguistics and the University of Texas at Arlington.

Jones, Linda K. and Coleman, Ned R. (1979) Towards a discourse perspective of modes and tenses in Kickapoo narratives. In Linda K. Jones (ed.), *Discourse Studies in Mesoamerican Languages*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Jones, Larry B. and Nellis, D. (1979) A discourse particle in Cajonos Zapotec. In Linda K. Jones (ed.), *Discourse Studies in Mesoamerican Languages*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Kalmar, I. (1982) Transitivity in a Czech folk tale. In Paul J. Hopper and Sandra A. Thompson (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics: Studies in Transitivity, Volume 15*. New York: Academic Press.

Kitkova, N.G. (1985) The use of English progressive and indefinite forms to convey the meanings of the Russian imperfective aspect. In Yuriy S. Maslov (ed.), *Studies in Descriptive Linguistics: Contrastive Studies in Verbal Aspect in Russian, English, French and German*. (Forsyth, Trans.) Heidelberg: Gross.

Kozintseva, N.A. (1985) A contrastive analysis of aspectual meanings in English and Russian verb forms. In Yuriy S. Maslov (ed.), *Studies in Descriptive Linguistics: Contrastive Studies in Verbal Aspect in Russian, English, French and German*. (Forsyth, Trans.) Heidelberg: Gross.

Labov, W. and Waletzky, J. (1967) Narrative analysis: oral versions of personal experience. In June Helm (ed.), *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Li, C., Thompson, Sandra A. and R. McMillan Thompson (1982) The discourse motivation for the perfect aspect: the Mandarin particle le. In Paul Hopper (ed.), *Tense-Aspect: Between Semantics and Pragmatics*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Longacre, R.E. (1979a) The discourse structure of the flood narrative. In G. MacRae (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature: 1976 Seminal Papers*. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press.

Longacre, R.E. (1979b) The paragraph as a grammatical unit. In T. Givon (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics: Discourse and Syntax, Volume 12.* New York: Academic Press.

Longacre, R.E. (1985) Discourse peak as zone of turbulence. In Jessica Wirth (ed.), *Beyond the Sentence: Discourse and Sentential Form.* Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers Incorporated.

Longacre, R.E. and Levinsohn, S. (1978) Field analysis of discourse. In W.U. Dressler (ed.), *Current Trends in Textlinguistics.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Machin, P.P. (1977) Discourse markers in Northern Popoloca. Master's thesis. University of Texas at Arlington.

Mandler, J. and Johnson, N. (1977) Remembrance of things parsed: story structure and recall. *Cognitive Psychology*, 9, 111 - 151.

Matveyeva, Ye. A. (1985) The use of aspects in four Russian translations of 'The Invisible Man' by H.G. Wells. In Yuriy S. Maslov (ed.), *Studies in Descriptive Linguistics: Contrastive Studies in Verbal Aspect in Russian, English, French and German.* (Forsyth, Trans.) Heidelberg: Gross.

McArthur, Harry S. (1979) The role of aspect in distinguishing Aguatec discourse types. In Linda K. Jones (ed.), *Discourse Studies in Mesoamerican Languages.* Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

McLeary, L. (1982) Transitivity and grounding in Portuguese narrative text. UCLA M.A. thesis.

Mourelatos, Alexander P.D. (1981) Events, process, and states. In Philip Tedeschi and Annie Zaenen (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics: Tense and Aspect.* New York: Academic Press.

Myhill, J. and Hibiya, J. (in press) The discourse function of clause chaining. To appear in John Haiman and Sandra Thompson (eds.), *Clause Chaining in Grammar and Discourse.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Newtson, D. (1973) Attribution and the unit of perception of ongoing behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 28, 28 - 38.

Newtson, D. and Engquist, G. (1976) The perceptual organization of ongoing behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 12, 436-450.

Newtson, D., Engquist, G. and Bois, J. (1977) The objective basis of behavior units. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35, 847-862.

Propp, V. (1958) *Morphology of the Folktale*. Volume 10. Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics.

Quirk, R. and Greenbaum, S. (1973) *A University Grammar of English*. London: Longman Group Ltd.

Rafferty, Ellen. (1982) Aspect in conversational Indonesian. In P. Hopper (ed.), *Tense-Aspect: Between Semantics and Pragmatics*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Reid, W. (1977) The quantitative validation of a grammatical hypothesis: the passé simple and the imparfait. *Papers of the Northeastern Linguistic Society 7*.

Reinhart, T. (in press) Principles of gestalt perception in the temporal organization of narrative texts. *Linguistics*.

Rumelhart, D. (1975) Notes on schema for stories. In D. Bobrow and A. Collins (eds.), *Representations and Understanding: Studies in Cognitive Science*. New York: Academic Press.

Salser, J.K. and Neva. (1977) Some features of Cubeo discourse and sentence structure. In Longacre and Woods (eds.), *Discourse Grammar: Studies in Indigenous Languages of Colombia, Panama and Ecuador*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Searle, John. (1974) Chomsky's revolution in linguistics. In Gilbert Harman (ed.), *On Noam Chomsky: Critical Essays*. New York: Anchor Press.

Sheffler, Margaret. (1978) Munduruku discourse. In J.E. Grimes (ed.), *Papers on Discourse*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Stein, N. and Glenn, C. (1982) Children's concept of time: the development of a story schema. In W. Friedman (ed.), *The Developmental Psychology of Time*. New York: Academic Press.

Svartvik, J. (1966) *On Voice in the English Verb*. The Hague: Mouton.

Talmy, Leonard. (1978) Figure and ground in complex sentences. In Joseph H. Greenberg (ed.), *Universals of Human Language*. Volume 4, 625-49. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Tomlin, R.S. (1984a) The treatment of foreground-background information in on-line descriptive discourse of second language learners. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 6, 115-142.

Tomlin, R.S. (1984b) The identification of foreground-background information in on-line oral descriptive discourse. Unpublished manuscript. Department of Linguistics. University of Oregon.

Tomlin, R.S. (1985) Foreground-background information and the syntax of subordination. *Text*, 5, 85-122.

Thompson, Sandra. (1983) Grammar and discourse: the english detached participial clause. In F. Klein-Andreu (ed.), *Discourse: Perspectives on Syntax*. New York: Academic Press.

Thompson, Sandra. (1987) "Subordination" and narrative event structure. In Russell S. Tomlin (ed.), *Coherence and Grounding in Discourse*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Townsend, David J. and Bever, Thomas G. (1977) Main and subordinate clauses. A study in figure and ground. Mimeo. Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club.

Tracy, H.P. and Levinsohn, S. (1978) Participant reference in Ica expository discourse. In R.E. Longacre (ed.), *Discourse Grammar, Part III.* Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics

Wald, Benji. (1987) Cross-clause relations and temporal sequence in narrative and beyond. In Russell S. Tomlin (ed.), *Coherence and Grounding in Discourse.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Walrod, Michael Ross. (1977) Discourse grammar in Ga'dang. Master's thesis. University of Texas at Arlington.

Waltz, Nathan E. (1976) Discourse functions of Guanano sentence and paragraph. In R.E. Longacre and Frances Woods (eds.), *Discourse Grammar: Studies in Indigenous Languages of Colombia, Panama and Ecuador.* Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics and the University of Texas at Arlington.

Wallace, Stephen. (1982) Figure and ground: the interrelationships of linguistic categories. In P. Hopper (ed.), *Tense-Aspect: Between Semantics and Pragmatics.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Waugh, Linda and Monville-Burston, Monique. (1986) Aspect and discourse function: the French simple past in newspaper usage. *Language*, 62:4, 846-875.

APPENDIX A - VERBATIM INSTRUCTIONS

Part I

In this experiment, you'll be watching a five minute film. After you've seen it, I'll introduce you to someone who hasn't seen the film. Her name is Tracey. What I'd like you to do is to describe as much of the film as you can remember to Tracey. Keep in mind that she has never seen the film.

Part II

I'd like you to complete two tasks that involve filling out some forms. What you'll be doing is rating the importance of things that you saw in the film. Before these forms, there are a set of instructions. Read all of them very carefully. If you have any questions concerning the tasks, please come to see me before you proceed with either of them. Bring the sheets back to me when you are finished.

APPENDIX B - IMPORTANCE JUDGEMENT SHEET[4]

4The actual importance judgement sheet used in the experiment was printed on a 11" X 17" page.

INSTRUCTIONS

YOU ARE NOW TO COMPLETE A TWO-PART TASK.

READ CAREFULLY ALL THE INSTRUCTIONS PERTAINING TO TASK I BEFORE BEGINNING WITH THE FIRST STEP OF THE TASK.

(1) On the first page following these instruction sheets, you will see a breakdown of the film you recently viewed. This breakdown consists of 52 events, plus descriptions of scenery and the main character, resulting in 67 items. Under each item you will find a scale of numbers from 1 (unimportant) to 5 (very important). Your task is to make a judgement as to the relative importance of each item.

First, read through the entire set of items to familiarize yourself with the range of actions and descriptions. Now, read through the set again, and pick out the item you found to be least important. Circle "1" for that item. Once again, read through the set, but this time find the item you viewed as most important, and circle "5" for it. You have now anchored your scale.

Finally, read each item, beginning with the first, and make a judgement as to its relative importance. Indicate your judgement by circling one of the numbers from "1" to "5" inclusive. Remember that you may use the numbers "1" and "5" again.

The scale of importance is as follows:

5 - Very important, crucial to the understanding of the film'
4 - Quite important, but not as important as 5
3 - Uncertain as to level of importance; cannot decide
2 - Relatively unimportant
1 - Unimportant

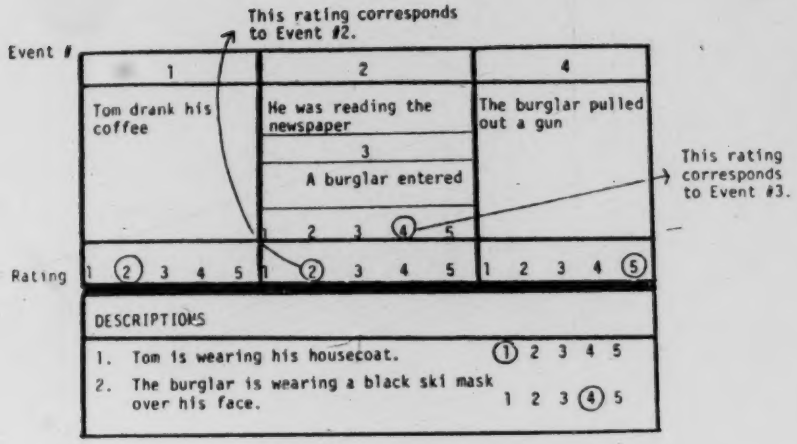
On the next page, you will see examples of the two types of items you will encounter on the sheet containing the breakdown of the film.

The first is an example of ratings given to EVENTS in a non-existent film.

The second is an example of ratings given to DESCRIPTIONS in a non-existent film.

This is what the format will look like on the page following these instruction sheets.

CONTINUED


This rating corresponds to Event #2.
Event #
1
2
4
Tom drank his coffee
He was reading the newspaper
3
A burglar entered
The burglar pulled out a gun
This rating corresponds to Event #3.
Rating
1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5
DESCRIPTIONS
1. Tom is wearing his housecoat.
1 2 3 4 5
2. The burglar is wearing a black ski mask over his face.
1 2 3 4 5

Judge each item independently. Do not go back and change your previous judgements.

THIS IS NOT A MEMORY TEST: Hence, if you encounter events that you cannot remember, do not rate the item; leave the space blank. Similarly, some of the DESCRIPTIONS are my interpretations of the "reality" of the film. It is possible that you may not agree with them. In this case, do not rate the item.

To summarize, if you cannot remember or do not agree with a particular item, then leave the space blank.

Proceed with this task now.

READ ALL OF THE INSTRUCTIONS PERTAINING TO TASK II BEFORE BEGINNING WITH THE FIRST STEP OF THE TASK.

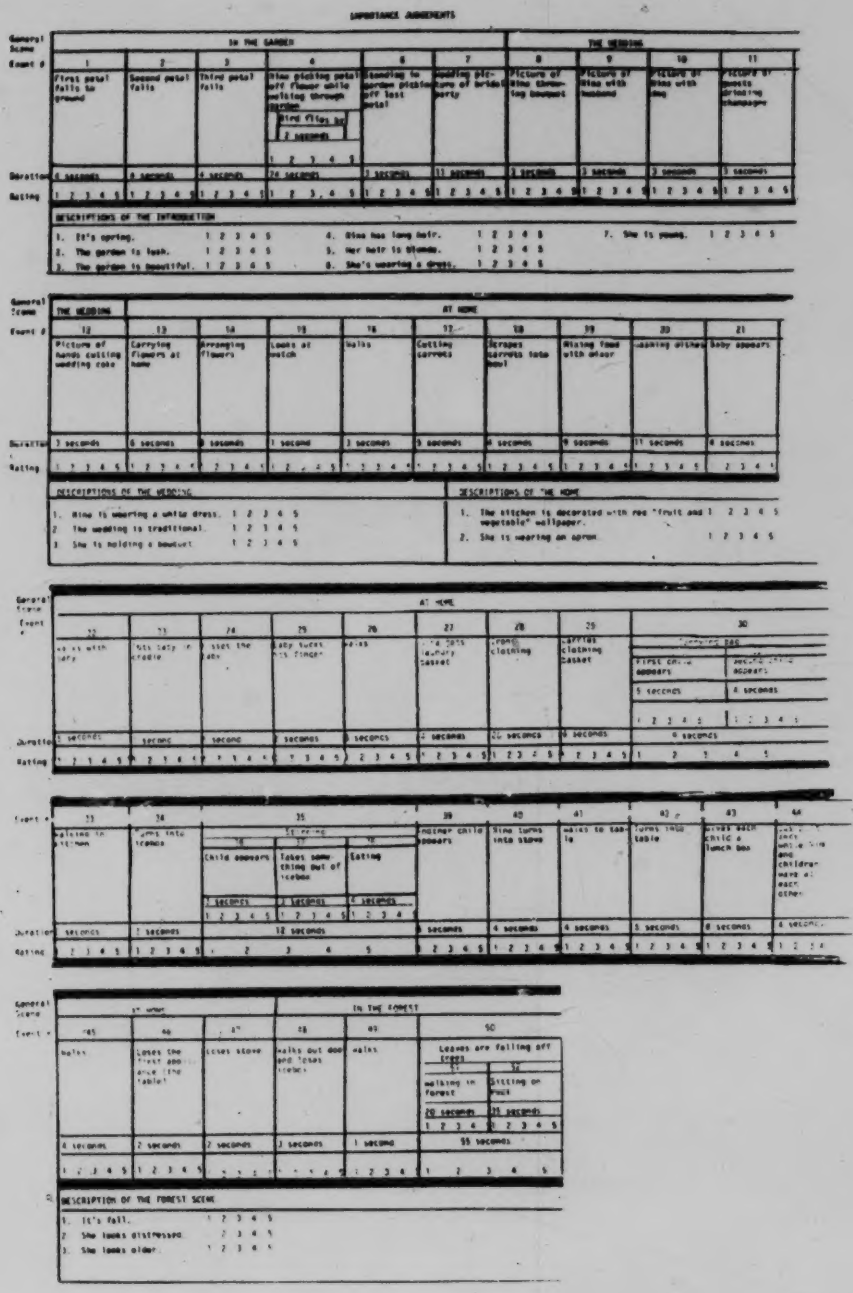
(II) On the second page following these instructions sheets, you will see eight sentences that are either summary statements of event sequences, or comments that arose from the interpretation of certain events. Across from each sentence, you will again find a scale of numbers from 1 - 5. Once again, your task is to make a judgement as to the relative importance of each sentence. However, this time you need not anchor the scale by finding the least and most important sentences in the set. Simply indicate your judgement by circling one of the numbers from "1" to "5" inclusive. Do not feel compelled to use all the numbers in the scale of importance. You may

CONTINUED . . . . .

find that you view the level of importance of all the sentences to be relatively similar or even identical.

Remember that some descriptions are my interpretations of the "reality" of the film. It is possible that you may not agree with them. In this case, do not rate the item.

Proceed with this task now.


IMPORTANCE AGREEMENTS
General Scene
Event #
IN THE GARDEN
THE WEDDING
1 First petal falls to ground
2 Second petal falls
3 Third petal falls
4 Rina pinking petal off flower while walking through garden
Bird flies by
2 seconds
5 Rina picking off last petal
6 Handing to garden pixie
7 Holding pic- ture of bride's party
8 Picture of Rina throw- ing bouquet
9 Picture of Rina with husband
10 Picture of Rina with dog
11 Picture of guests drinking champagne
Duration
Rating
6 seconds
8 seconds
4 seconds
24 seconds
3 seconds
11 seconds
3 seconds
3 seconds
3 seconds
DESCRIPTIONS OF THE INTRODUCTION
1. It's spring.
2. The garden is lush.
3. The garden is beautiful.
4. Rina has long hair.
5. Her hair is blonde.
6. She's wearing a dress.
7. She is young.
THE WEDDING
AT HOME
12 Picture of hands cutting wedding cake
13 Carrying flowers at home
14 Arranging flowers
15 Looks at watch
16 Waits
17 Cutting carrots
18 Scrapes carrots into bowl
19 Mixing food with mixer
20 Hearing others
21 Baby appears
3 seconds
6 seconds
8 seconds
1 second
3 seconds
9 seconds
8 seconds
8 seconds
11 seconds
6 seconds
DESCRIPTIONS OF THE WEDDING
1. Rina is wearing a white dress.
2. The wedding is traditional.
3. She is holding a bouquet.
DESCRIPTIONS OF THE HOME
1. The kitchen is decorated with red "fruit and vegetable" wallpaper.
2. She is wearing an apron.
AT HOME
22 Sits with baby
23 Sits baby in cradle
24 Visit the baby
25 Baby turns his finger
26 Waits
27 Takes baby's clothes basket
28 Irons clothing
29 Carries clothing basket
30
First child appears
Second child appears
5 seconds
4 seconds
5 seconds
2 seconds
2 seconds
2 seconds
3 seconds
12 seconds
20 seconds
10 seconds
6 seconds
31 Walking in kitchen
34 Turns into street
35 Scoring
36 Child appears
37 Takes something out of verbos
38 Eating
7 seconds
7 seconds
4 seconds
12 seconds
39 Another child appears
40 Rina turns into street
41 Walks to table
42 Turns into table
43 Drops each child a lunch box
44 Waves each child a lunch box and children wave at each other
5 seconds
4 seconds
4 seconds
5 seconds
8 seconds
4 seconds
AT HOME
IN THE FOREST
45 Waits
46 Loses the first apple from the table
47 Loses stone
48 Walks out door and loses marbles
49 Waits
50 Leaves are falling off trees
51 Walking in forest
52 Sitting on mat
20 seconds
25 seconds
4 seconds
2 seconds
2 seconds
3 seconds
1 second
55 seconds
DESCRIPTION OF THE FOREST SCENE
1. It's fall.
2. She looks distressed.
3. She looks older.

SUMMARIES OF EVENT SEQUENCES AND COMMENTS

1.	At the beginning of the film, Nina is young and carefree.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	She gets married.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	She has children.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	She assumes the shape of various appliances.	1 2 3 4 5
5.	Near the end of the film, she loses all the appliances.	1 2 3 4 5
6.	Her home life is mundane and full of drudgery.	1 2 3 4 5
7.	Her children treat her like an object.	1 2 3 4 5
8.	At the end of the film, she reflects upon her life.	1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX C - ORAL NARRATIVES

S01, F, 42,

S: Okay, there was a young woman, she was walking through the forest, and she was picking petals off of a flower, and tossing them aside. Perhaps she was deciding what she was going to do with her life - I don't know. And, the next scene we see her getting married. She's in a wedding gown and she has a floral bouquet, sort of a light motif running through the whole thing arethe flowers.(laugh)

L: Uh huh.

S: We see different scenes from the wedding. We see them cutting the cake and drinking wine, and she's hugging her dog. And, next scene is her walking into the - her house carrying a bouquet of flowers, and all over the walls of the house seem to be pictures of flowers and fruit.

L: Umhm.

S: very colorful. Uh. What happens next. (laugh) She - We see her doing housework. She's whipping whipping cream or something, it doubles in volume, and, she does something else I can't remember, and then she is washing dishes.

L: Uh huh.

S: Lots of soap bubbles, and - voila', she discovers a baby.(laugh)

L: In the water?

S: In the water (laugh) yeah.

(Both laugh)

S: So she takes this baby and puts it in the, in the basinet. And the baby has little frills upon its sleeves, and it has a little sort of cap that looks like a flower. And then she proceeds to do more housework. She's ... first of all, she's carrying a laundry basket, obviously full of baby things, and

uh, then she, then she does a lot of ironing which seems to be ridiculous to me because she has to uh, she.... it looks like she's ironing towels.(laugh)

(Both laugh)

L: Which nobody would ever do!

S: which seems to be needless. But, anyway, she's doing that. Um, and then, uh, I'm not exactly sure of the sequence of events, anyway, there, suddenly there's a boy, a four year old five year old kid, and the baby's still there, and she's still doing housework. But, there's a transition that.. that happens, she suddenly becomes part of the furniture. She's just part of the house, part of the fridge, and she's...

L: How did they do that in the film? Is this real?

S: No, it's not real. She's just walking around. There... there's always been this icebox sitting there, and the stove and things, and suddenly she's walking around, and she becomes...she's got the head and arms, and she's the icebox. And it's written on there, "icebox", so you know what it is.

(Both laugh)

S: And the..and the boy comes along, and he opens it up, and takes a piece .. something out, I don't... an apple I think. And um, and then she's the stove, and she fills the lunch boxes. See, she's just part of the house, and so... and that's the way the kids seem to be treating her.

L: Yeah.

S: And then she's uh part of the table or something, I couldn't exactly identify it. Maybe she's just a couch or chesterfield. And she's handing out the lunch boxes, as all <u>three</u> kids; somewhere in the middle there..there was a:.an older daughter appeared, so there... now there's three kids. They all go to school. She waves goodbye to them on the school bus. And, then she starts walking slowly to the door. And at this point, she's part of... she's carrying the icebox, and she's part of the stove, and

the... the other thing, whatever it was..the chesterfield. And as she gets to the door she divests these things. And she walks back out into the woods where we saw her at the beginning. But now the woods isn't full of beautiful colors and flowers and birds singing. Now it's just a.. an autumn

L: Umhm.

S: woods. Uh. The trees are pretty well bare, and uh... there are leaves falling off the trees. And she walks along, and sits on a rock, and thinks.(laugh) "What have I done with my life?"

(Both laugh)

L: And that's the whole story.

S: Yeah.

L: Okay.

S02, F, 25,

S: It opens up with a girl... or you just see little white things falling onto a forest floor. And, the focus is on a female who's throwing the petals, and, I'm assuming it's someone young and lithe, almost the spring of youth.

L: Umhm.

S: And um, next thing you know she's getting married. She's in a bridal gown and everyone's happy for her, and everything's like hunky dory. She goes into a house setting, where she's doing domestic tasks, um, cooking, baking, doing dishes, and up pops out of the suds a baby into her arms. (laugh) Um. She takes on the mother role and in the process is still doing the cooking, baking, ironing and you see two more kids emerge in her life. A strange part...she starts taking on the shape of appliances. Um.

(both laugh)

The icebox in particular, um, and I'm not exactly sure why other than... maybe a mom becomes an all-purpose tool in the house, that the kids use.

L: Yeah.

S: When the kids are of school age, she packs a lunch, they all tot off, wave goodbye to mommie from the window, and then she leaves the house, and as she goes out of the house, she drops each set of appliance along the way until she walks back to her woods. By this time, the season is fall, and I'm assuming one it's either , she progressed in life and she's gone through the seasons so it's showing an age difference. Or, you could look at it to be a more, um, dismal time of the year as compared to the spring at the beginning of the film where there's no longer the leaves on the trees, things are brown, and she looks a little bit more sullen as she sits on a rock and contemplates, whatever, where she is in life.

L: Yeah. So, is it a happy film, a sad film? Overall?

S: Um.

L: Kind of a low note at the end.

S: Yeah. She looks extremely cheery throughout the whole film. Um. The title was, um the life of a working woman, or working moms.

L: Uhhuh.

S: Something to that effect. It wasn't exactly what I had thought a working mom was; cause I was thinking of my own circumstance where my mom is a mom, plus she works outside the house, and yet, watching this lady, yeah she is a workingmom, but within the home environment.

L: Yeah.

S: Um. Whether it's happy or not. I would say for the main focus of it, it is. There's no disagreement between her and the kids, she doesn't look discontented with her life. It's funny, there's no reference to her husband as ever being part of that.

L: Yeah.

S: It could be when she goes into the woods during the fall that she just wants a quiet moment to herself - to reflect on things.

L: Yeah.

S: So, it could be happy then also.

L: Good. Okay.

S03, M, 31,

S: Lady wandering through a garden, appeared to be a garden like Eden. Picking petals off a flower. He loves me, he loves me not. He loves me, he loves me not. He loves me. Uh, wedding scene, several... looks like classical pictures of, uh, the wedding. People drinking booze.

(L laughs) Holding a dog, laughing. Um... Family life. Classic icebox...preparing lunches. Washing dishes, all of a sudden, one little kid pops up. Takes the little child, puts her in the crib. Starts doing other chores. Let's see... cooking, chopping a carrot, can hear the..the knife cutting through the carrot, then, looks like,...kid number two comes along, some little kid crawling on the floor, at first you think it's like the first one, looks an awful lot like the first one. But then, he, another child who is obviously much older pops up, and... so then you assume, uh, then she's had her second child. And at this time, she starts taking on aspects of the surrounding furniture. She... at first she looks like an icebox,

(I. laughs)

and, she wanders around the house with an icebox, uh... her first child opens the door of the icebox, takes food out, um... then the third child· girl, is uh... comes into the scene. At this time the woman is .. becomes a stove, wandering around.

L: How do they do that? How do they·

S: It's all..all in animation, and you see her head, but, she's becoming very large, and she takes on, like she looks just like the stove. It becomes part of her dress, except for her arms.(laugh)

L: Sounds really bizarre.

S: Yeah.(laugh) And, um. She takes on...First of all she's the fridge, then she's the stove. Then you see her preparing lunches for her kids, they're going off to school. She's uh..she's lying in bed for

some reason at this point in time. And, she has three lunch pails out on the edge of the bed and she... each child lines up, takes a lunch pail, she shoves it, the lunch pail, off to each kid, picks it up, the next kid lines up, she pushes the lunch pail towards him, and the the last one, in order of age from the oldest to the youngest. And then, she's back in the - the garden, but this time instead of being spring, it's fall; and all the leaves have- have fallen off of the- the trees, or they're coming down. And she's wandering through the garden and she sits on a rock, and she's ...just looks from side to side, and isn't doing anything. Uh, she looks, she looks very m- uh, oh yes, there's something different. Before she went into the garden, she ... as I said, she was looking like, taking on aspects of the household as if she was a part of the household.

L: Yeah.

S: She was - I said a fridge, stove .. they were becoming a part of her... and.. And then, when she walked out of the house, to go into the garden for the last time, the stove and the fridge were battered up and lying about in the house, and then she walked out and then she sat on the rock. It was fall. And I noticed throughout the film, that she always wore the same clothes. She looked the same, except for the occassions when she was a fridge or a stove.

(Both laugh)

And uh, at the end, she was just sitting on the rock and she looked the same as she was at the very first, uh... when she left, but it looked like the world had changed

L: Umhm.

S: around her. But she was the same. She hadn't changed throughout her whole experience with the kids. And that was basically the end.

L: That was the end of the film. Well.

S04, M, 35.

S: Well. Fairly simple story line actually. Poignantly put, uh.. the idyllic, the idyllic scene of a young woman becoming uh.. falling in love apparently. Getting married, uh.. significantly, the husband disappearing, and her subsequent disillusionment with married life. I would interpret it as that. Including uh.. housework and children, and the whole bag of tricks. Supposedly unsupported by her absent husband which I didn't quite follow.

(I. laughs)

I.: Okay, do you wanna go into a little more detail. Like, I haven't seen this movie, so I don't know sort of how they show that. Maybe you could sort of go through it.

S: All right. Um. A description of the movie?

I.: Yeah.

S: Ah! The movie opens, it's a cartoon.

I.: Okay.

S: Done in uh colored graphics. Very well done in modern style. Uh, fairly simple cartoon. An idyllic picture of a, of a rosy checked, white skinned, blonde, uh person named Nina - apparently.

(I. laughs)

who is skipping through a, uh - well not exactly skipping, walking through a forest, colorful forest with trees, flowers and very, very full uh.. imagery. Uh, plucking white petals from a daisy; well, I take it to be a daisy, but maybe it's not. And reaches the conclusion , the final petal being I presume, "he loves me". Because, uh the scene immediately changes then to a standard wedding shot. Uh..black and white gown, this and that. Uh.. then, the movie switches from movie to stills, with a

loud click on the soundtrack each picture of the wedding, different part of the wedding, gran andmas, grandpas, cutting the cake.

L: Umhm.

S: And then, clicks immediately to a - back to movie with a picture of, I mean, Nina working in the house. The absolute picture of domestic bliss. It is <u>really</u> well done. Little noises on the soundtrack. Basically, the soundtrack. No verbalizations. Only one thing I could hear was during the wedding, during one of the shots there was (whispers)"Isn't he handsome?" which was the only thing I could hear. Anyway, so there's this little sound of dishes clinking and chopping carrots and, and uh..uh, like that. And, that to be supplanted suddenly by, uh, N-- interesting technique, Nina doing dishes with soap suds bouncing around, uh, suddenly blum! there's a baby in her arms. And she goes (high voice) "Oooh!"(laughs)

(Both laugh)

S: Nice soundtrack. (laughs) And uh, then, from the -- at the, the idyllic nature of the movie changes to somewhat more sombre and indeed quite uh, uh... saddening in some ways. Because the baby doesn't seem to bring much joy, but brings rather a ton of work. And in short order click, there's another one, bam, there's yet a third one. They're tall and going off to school, and Nina is now portrayed as, as she walks around, uh the kitchen, around the house, uh, as having the appliances cartooning, cartooning but collapsed onto her body. So she's the bed, and uh, the stove, and a refrigerator, and she seems to be slowing down, and lugging this heavy stuff around. And her children are uh, you know, uh off to school. School bus, "toot toot", bye-bye. And she sheds the uh-she's walking, now leaving the house, uh, for a walk, we will think to return to the wonderful, glorious, uh summery pictures of the opening images of the film. Uh. As she leaves, as she's walking through the house to get to the door she sheds the bed, she sheds the stove, she sheds the refrigerator, which fall away not in correct order but fall away at an angle. Uh, and then she's outdoors walking, from right to left, instead of the screen from left to right when she entered, so its a ...parenthesis

around the movie in effect. And its fall in the forest. There are no colors, except the sombre earth hues of uh brown trunks, grey. It's not a bright fall day, but rather a sombre fall day. And uh, she wanders out in the middle of the woods and sits down upon something. And there are brown leaves whisking through the air in the same way that in the opening scene it was white petals

L: Umhm

S: from the dand - dandilion! from the daisy she was picking. Uh. very- very poignant.

L: And that was the end of the movie?

S: Well, then there was a credit roll, and then it was the end of the movie.

L: Yah. Okay, that's good. So the spring and fall of her life.

S: That's the name "The Spring and Fall of Nina Boranski, if I remember. Nina somebody.

S05, F, 24,

S: 'Kay, um.. I remember the title was The Rise and Fall of Nina Polanski, and it starts off.. a woman alone walking through the forest, um... picking petals off a flower, seems to be quite free. And then it shows her all of a sudden getting married to a man, and it shows a scene at the wedding exchanging vows. And.. um.. throwing the bouquet. And, then it shows her sort of in domestic bliss at home washing dishes and ironing and cleaning and she seems to be quite contented, arranging flowers on the table. And then, all of a sudden when she's doing the dishes, well a child pops out (laugh), and she suddenly has children, and things seem still .. still seem to be fine. But then all of a sudden there's about 3 children, and I think she's getting burdened by housework, and she's .. it shows her.. it shows her saying goodbye to the kids uh.. as they leave the house getting on the school bus, and, it just seems that she's not feeling quite fulfilled, and sort of shows her lugging around the- the dishwasher and the refrigerator, and it seems like there's something lacking in her life. Then it shows her uh... back in the forest sitting on a rock, sort of (laugh) "What happened to me?" (laugh) "How did I get here?" And, um, sort of ends on a sad note, like there's something missing in her life.

L: Yeah.

S: That's about it.

L: So did you like it?

S: Yeah, I liked it. It was good, I really liked, the, the violin. We were talking a couple minutes, it's Bach or something.(laugh) It was a good film, yeah.

S06, F, 22,

S: Okay, um, the title of the movie was the Spring and Fall on Nina Polanski. And it's sort of a, um.. you know like a paper doll animation. Have you ever seen Yellow Submarine?

L: Oh yeah.

S: It's like that.

L: Yeah.

S: 'Kay and um... it begins with uh.. these petals, they turn out to be uh, daisy petals, floating down. And then they zoom back to uh.. a lady going like this, and uh there are no words throughout the movie, there's a little singing and once she goes "oh." But, um, and... apparently she's just going "he loves me, he loves me not." And then they show her getting married. And it's in a snapshot type form.

L: Umhm.

S: And, uh.. they show her throwing her bouquet and, and uh holding her dog and all and all this stuff, and, and then she's at her new home. And, she's uh...washing the dishes, and all of a sudden a baby pops up. (laugh)

(both laugh)

S: And, and um (laugh)... that's where she goes "oh!"

(both laugh)

S: And she puts the baby to bed and gets back to work ironing. And then uh, these other children appear, and all together she had 3 children. And uh.. as she.. as the chil- like the children follow her along the room, and she picks up the fridge, the fridge becomes part of her. And I think that sort of

symbolizes that uh.. she's become all these things to the children.

L: umhm.

S: 'Cause she adds the stove and the furniture, so you know, she has to do all these things. But, uh.. her children go off to school, and then she heads out the door, and as she's heading out, uh.. all these things fall off again. So, uh.. uh then she's out in it looks like forest, and, um, she sits down on a rock and the leaves are falling. So I guess that's sort of where the spring and the fall comes from. Like when she was throwing petals, it was very flowery around her.

L: Uh huh.

S: So that was spring, and then, there's the forest; that's the fall. And, I think it was very symbolic. (laugh)

L: Uh, so you figured it symbolized..

S: Uh... well the spring was perhaps her youth and everything seemed so nice and... you know flowery. And then fall comes, that's uh.. her decline sort of. But uh. She looks around, and I kind of got the impression that she's wondering what has she done with her life.

L: Yeah.

S: You know, like she's sort of existed having babies, and and... didn't do much of much of anything. So, that's what I got out of it. (laugh)

L: Okay. Well that sounds good.

S07, M, 20.

S: Well, what it starts off with is a relatively young lady walking through the woods. And it's pretty well springtime. There's a lot of leaves falling around her but they're pretty well in blossom. And uh...the camera pretty well centers in on her face and all of a sudden it pulls back and she's at a wedding reception - it's her wedding. And you see relatives there, and cutting the cake, and so on. Then she's in a house. And pretty well what happens in the house is..is...she's washing a few dishes, cleaning clothes, basically doing all sorts of chores, and a kid appears as - out of the water as she's washing dishes, the first kid. And then uh...she walks by this fridge and then the fridge becomes attached to her, becomes part of her as she's walking to the stove and starts stirring up some food. And, then she moves her back a bit, the stove's part of her now also. And two little kids appear so she has three kids now. She's sitting at the table and giving them their lunches for them to go to school and she walks away. And it's the table, fridge and the stove are all attached to her. The school bus pulls out. You see this from the window. And as it's gone you see she walks, first the table drops off, then the stove drops off, and the fridge drops off of her. And she walks - she walks out back into these woods and she's still wearing her apron and so on. 'Cept the difference is now she sits on the same rock she was sitting on before, and there's leaves falling. Except it's fall. The trees all look pretty dead as they are towards winter. Leaves falling everywhere.

I: Yeah.

S: And that's the film. Very short film.

I: Huh. Sounds like a pretty strange little film.

S: I'm not supposed to tell you what my interpretation is, I'm just supposed to tell you what happened?

I: You can tell me your interpretation if you want.

S: Well, is that necessary? Do you want to know that?

L: Yeah.

S: oh okay. Well it's basically this, uh- this loss of freedom and has picked up all these burdens. And uh, she can't shed that skin right away. They stay with her.

S08, M, 23,

S: What do you want to hear - just what happened? I guess I'll do that first.

L: Yeah, I haven't seen this film before so I don't know, I just-

S: Okay, it's an animated - It's animated. I didn't think the animation was very good. It was um - sort of where they cut out cardboard things and then move them.

L: Oh yeah.

S: And...(long pause) Well it starts out with uh.. a young lady walking around in a really quite nice forest - it's spring. Actually, it doesn't quite start out like that. It starts out with uh- some petals dropping in this forest. And uh.. this - And then you see a girl pulling petals off a flower. And...all of a sudden she - uh - appears in a wedding scene out of this forest. It's kind of odd how that happens. Sort of closes up on her and the background scene changes and her dress changes. (pause)

L: (laugh)like that.

S: (laugh)just like that. I sort of laughed when that happened. I thought - when I first saw that - I thought maybe she's dreaming 'cause she's picking the flowers sort of thing - one petal off at a time - sort of um...loves me,loves me not sort of thing. And...so...they show a party at this wedding and uh - it was pretty - and uh... there was one picture of her holding a sheep which I can still remember (laugh) I think it was a sheep - it was just <u>really</u> odd. Maybe it wasn't a sheep. That was quite odd anyway. And um..hmm..(pause) And -uh- well then after she was married-she um...sort of faded out again into a house and she was busy doing chores in her house. She's cutting up carrots and things. And her house has an awful lot of carrots - there's carrots - all over the wallpaper - quite odd. And ...uh...(pause) while she was doing the dishes, a baby just popped out of the sink.

(both laugh)

L: dangerous thing to do.

S: If you do dishes babies come out. And ..uh oh the baby crawled around a little bit (pause) And during this part of the movie there was a bit of cello music in the background - baroque style. And then it switched to flute style - a little bit more irritating. And..um (pause) oh the baby wandered around a bit and it grew. And it sort of grew in the same sort of popping way. Uh...I think before that baby itself grew, um.. other small children appeared. I didn't actually exactly understand how these other children appeared - but they were bigger than the baby. But I didn't understand that at all.(laugh) I sort of think it might be that the baby was um- growing into this child and then another baby was appearing there.

L: Yeah.

S: While she was doing chores and stuff. And then...mm..when she came in no - (pause) She turned into a refrigerator - and the children open up her

L: She just became a fridge?

S: Well uh - she walked past the refrigerator and it got caught behind her and it turned into her dress. And ...they go up to the refrigerator and pig out - and... then she turned into a counter or something and handed them their lunch buckets. And...(pause) the kids wandered off, got onto a school bus(pause) And...it's away and she turns back from the-the refrigerator into a person and well she was a refrigerator and a counter - okay, a counter and a stove at the same time actually. That was a bit chaotic, the way she just turned into a refrigerator.

L: Sounds kinda bizarre.

S: Yeah...it was quite-quite humourous. And then it went back to the sort of first scene only instead of a - a nice sort of forest it was all fall, and all the leaves were falling, and she was kinda old and kinda sad, and - it ended.

L: So did you like it?

S: Yeah. It was good fun.

S09, F, 22,

S: Okay - do you wanna hear the story or - like the actions or.. more details - or

L: Well, I haven't seen it actually - so , if you could just tell me-

S: Okay. Okay. Well it starts out with, there's a woman walking through some sort of flower garden or something and uh .. she's picking the petals off a daisy sort of in a uh..he loves me, he loves me not sort of way. And then it sort of tra - there's a transition to a wedding. And uh - she's the same woman and she's the bride and it sort of - the wedding is sort of done in a snapshot style - like you'll see a snapshot of them cutting the cake or you know the wedding party and there's a few - quite a few pictures of what happened at the wedding. Then um - she's in her house I gather - this is after she's married and she's doing all kinds of household tasks. Like uh...uh you know - making - baking things and cutting vegetables, and washing dishes. And while she's washing dishes, a baby appears from somewhere - so (laugh) she - uh- obviously had a baby. And... so she puts the baby to bed and then she continues doing some more household - you know like ironing - things like that. And ..uh...she..this part is kind of weird. She - all of a sudden there's more kids around so obviously their family has expanded. But she's - she turns into these house- well she doesn't turn into them but they become incorporated into her. There's an icebox , and a stove, and you know the kids are taking things out of the icebox and eating them and things like that. And then...the kids all- get on a bus and go to school and she sheds appliances(laugh)

L: That must have been kind of weird.

S: Yah. It's strange. I'm not sure exactly what it's representing , but sort of one of those metaphoric films I guess. And uh - then it looks like she goes out into a garden of some sort and .. is jut sort of sitting there, and there's leaves falling and she's just sitting thinking about things - I don't know what. And that's where it ends.

L.: Okay. Well that's good. Thanks.

S10, F, 30,

S: Okay, I just watched a five minute film about the spring and summer of Nina Polanski. And it's an animated version or film produced by the National Film Board of Canada and it starts out with a forest scene, probably in the spring, and there's uh - petals or feathers that seem to be floating to the ground and birds are singing. And then the camera - um focuses in on a young girl and she's picking petals off a daisy. He loves me, he loves me not, that type of thing. And the next thing you know, she's in a wedding gown with a groom beside her. And it goes through several traditional scenes of weddings. A ceremony, and then picture taking with family, and the family pet.

L: Yeah.

S: and everything. And the next thing you know she's in the kitchen, and she's cooking. And she's cutting up carrots and cooking and then doing dishes. And out of the suds in the dishwater pops a baby, so she has a baby. (laughs) And now she's into - uh the family way, and she's got this child and so she's into heavy washing, laundry, ironing. And uh... then all of a sudden, the baby is um- crawling on the floor and up pops another kid. Now she's got two. And uh... she's helping them to food from the refrigerator and next thing you know she's got three. And as each child - she starts having more and more children, then this woman starts becoming identified with the items in the kitchen - as she moves past the refrigerator she - the regrigerator becomes part of her so her body - like instead of having a dress on, it's like her body is the refrigerator.

L: Oh.

S: She moves to the stove, and the stove is glued to her. And - then the kids wave goodbye, and they're on the school bus and she's waving goodbye to them and she walks out the door and as she walks out of the house door - uh - she gradually drops off the table, and then the stove.

L: Uhhuh.

S: and the last thing to drop off is the refrigerator and she's back in the garden again only now it's fall and there's no leaves left on the trees. The branches are bare and - uh...you're left with a feeling of sadness. I don't know how you're supposed to interpret it whether it's - uh- sad for her that you know she's missed everything and it's too late, or whether you're supposed to feel happy that she's now back to nature and she's free to go out. I guess that's up to you to iterpret.

L: Yeah. So did you like it?

S: Yeah. I really - I thought it was really neat because - uh the animation is quite good. It's very simple, to the point, a lot of symbolism. It's very French; the pattern they choose for the wallpaper and the flowers she puts on the table, and stuff, they're very French, very colorful.

L: Hmm. That sounds good.

S11,F, 32,

S: Okay. This is a movie about working women and it's um... called the spring and fall of Nina somebody or other. And it starts out and she's uh uh - walking through the woods pulling the petals out of a daisy, kind of like the game of you love me, you love me not.

L: Oh yeah.

S: And all of a sudden, she turns around and looks right at the camera. It's animated - and she turns all white and the camera comes back and she's a bride standing there with these flowers. And uh...the next pictures are kind of like slides with pictures of the people at the wedding. She's sitting there holding a dog at one point, which I couldn't figure out. Um...so she's at her wedding. She's standing there and she throws her bouquet and then all of a sudden, the next frame, she's in a kitchen and she's putting flowers in a vase. And she puts the flowers in the vase and she walks around the kitchen, cleaning up and everything's bright and sunny and she's doing the dishes and all of a sudden, there's a baby which grows right out of the dishwater. Oh great. (both laugh). So fine. So things start to get a little busier and she walks around the house and all of a sudden there's another baby, except it's grown up, it's a little boy and uh - so she walks into the kitchen and then all of a sudden, she turns into the refrigerator. And the little boy ... she-she's ...there's the refrigerator and her head's coming out of it and her feet are coming out of the bottom, and she's the refrigerator. And the little boy comes up, opens the refrigerator and takes something out of it. And then she uh...all of a sudden, there's another child there, a little girl. And Nina turns into the stove and ...she gives all the children their lunches and sends them off to school on the school bus. At this point, she is now the fridge, the stove and the kitchen table all in one. I don't know if that's some sort of you know, statement on weight gain or what, but uh - she get's pretty large. And uh - after the children have gone off to school, she goes to walk out the door and first the kitchen table kind of falls away, and the stove falls away, and the fridge falls away. And she goes out and sits in the woods and it's not spring anymore, it's fall and all the leaves are falling down. She just sits there and that's the end.

L: Hmm. So did you like it?

S: It was kinda nice. I- I don't know what the point was. I suppose it was just the standard point of women having to take care of children.

L: Yeah. Well it sounds kind of uh- interesting.

S12, F, 21,

S: Okay. I think it's called The role of the Working Woman or something the working woman.

L: Yeah.

S: And it showed a woman with a flower and she was walking through a garden. It was springtime. And then - it changed scenes and she'd got married. And it was a wonderful wedding and there were voices in the background saying "Oh won't she be so happy" and "don't they look so happy" and - just a happy marriage. And then it showed her doing the stereotypical roles of women, she was cooking and cleaning and wandering around. And while she was doing the dishes a baby popped out of the water and she said, "oh." (laugh) And she took care of the baby and she loved the baby and she continued with the cooking and the cleaning like a typical woman.

L: Yeah.

S: And...oh - then she was walking along cleaning and she turned into the fridge. And, as though she was adopting the role - oh sorry - she's uh - the fridge just seems to surround her.

L: Yeah.

S: She's walking along with an icebox around her - And - as though she's assuming the role of - the food bearer as well - I'm not sure. And at that point you realize that the baby has grown up to be a child of about seven or eight - and she - um the child who is now seven or eight took food from the mother. She opened up the fridge which was actually her mother, um... and then she walked by - the mother walked by the stove and became a stove, and a second child appeared so you realize, okay, she's got two children now. And she walked - the mother walked by the table and became the fridge, the stove and the table. And there were three lunch boxes on it and - ..so there were now three children. And each child came up and took their lunch box and walked out the door. And she walked back through the house and lost the fridge, and lost the stove and lost the table. So she became

herself again.

L: Yeah.

S: just walking around. And she walked out - did I say she said goodbye to her children on their way to school?

L: No

S: Well anyway, they left. She said goodbye. She lost her fridge, her stove and her table. And oh, she walked out into - her life seemed to be same anyway except now it's fall or autumn. And she looked, maybe this is my imagination, she looked somewhat sadder. But the movie has shown a progression. It was spring and she was a young woman and now it's fall, and she's getting older and she's had her children and she's assumed her duties or her role.

L: Yeah.

S: And, oh there's this classical background music - and that's it.

L: Okay. Good.

S13, M, 20.

S: Okay uh - it starts off like when the film counts down the numbers and the it - uh goes through the producer and all that at the beginning and the title is ... uh - spring and fall of Nina Polanski. And show this uh- girl walking through the woods. And uh - she's plucking the petals off a flower.

L: Mhmm.

S: And uh...little birds fly through the screen. And then uh she's sitting there and everything, and she keeps walking through and stuff goes falling off the trees and then she stops and all of a sudden the picture stops and freezes her and she becomes a picture. And the picture is - uh - like - it's a family.

L: Uhhuh.

S: Like a large picture of a family and then the picture changes again - it's like a - the process of her marriage - the pictures. And uh - then it's a picture of her with her husband, her with her hand cutting the cake

L: Oh yeah.

S: And then um...uh...oh, their parents and stuff like that and then the picture comes to life and she's at home. And uh - she's going through the routines of the day I guess. And then all of a sudden - no, she goes and she starts making food

L: Mhmm.

S: She cuts up the carrots and she puts 'em into a pot and then they start beating up and then, all of a sudden - but, they don't go through any meal - all of a sudden, she's washing the dishes

L: Yeah.

S: She's washing the dishes, she's got her hands, and then all of a sudden, in her hands is a baby. Okay.

L.: Is this a - a real thing?

S: No, it's in - it's in animation.

L.: Oh. Allright.

S: And, so all of a sudden she's got this baby - she takes the baby away, puts it - her to sleep. And then she's walking through the house again, and she walks into the kitchen. And...she uh... walks by the fridge - and it's got - says "icebox" on it. She walks, and she's standing by the stove and all of a sudden her clothes take the form of the icebox. So she's standing at the stove, picture of her head, and her body is the icebox. And then - a brunette girl appears on the screen. And she walks over and opens the icebox, which is like her mother's front, or whatever, her body. (laugh) Takes something out and sits there. And her mother is still - still there, this body sitting with the head on it, and all of a sudden, poof, there's a blonde girl on the screen. Okay. Then uh - so that's three kids. And then uh - she walks - she keeps walking and she becomes part of the icebox and then half her body becomes the stove, and a chair. And it's like (laugh). And so she's standing there, waiting uh - then all of a sudden, she's got these three uh - lunch boxes. Uh - the kids are gonna go to school - all three kids walk by, and uh - grab their box off of the stove, which is on her body. And they go out and they go to their school bus, on the other side of the window is one of the kids, and the school bus drives away and she waves. Then she walked through the house - then all of a sudden she's walking in the forest again, but it's now fall. So, all the leaves are falling off the trees and everything. And uh - she sits down on a rock, big rock in the middle of the forest, and they show leaves falling around her. And then uh - they stop it and the credits come through - the end. And that's it.

S14, F, 33,

S: So, we start out this film, the rise and fall of Nina Polanski. And...they start out with little petals floating down and - and you see her walking through sort of a lush, green place and - and she's picking the petals off of a flower. Obviously, well it's not obvious I guess, she's just picking the petals off, and then all of a sudden, you see her with um - a man in her wedding gown and all that. So obviously, she was going, he loves me, he loves me not - she gets married. And then -

L: What happened there?

S: Oh, then they had the pictures of the family and all that. The wedding pictures, you know, the wedding. And then, she goes about her business arranging flowers, doing dishes, leading a nice quiet married life, and then she's doing the dishes one day, and she gets her baby. Her first little baby pops into her arms. And uh then she goes about her business some more, and she does the dishes - no she does the laundry, and all of a sudden another kid pops up and then, she's in the kitchen and she - the icebox kinda gloms onto her - and (laugh) the kids start taking the food out of her, out of her 'cause she's the icebox. And then - oh what happens next? oh, and then, I think there's another kid pops up, see we've got one, two kids already?

L: Umhmm.

S: Somewhere along the line another kid pops-up. She also turns into a stove (laugh) - and she goes - that's right, after the third kid, she fixes all the lunch - lunches for them and sends them all off to school. And - there's another piece of furniture that comes on there - but uh - I - I didn't know what it was. And uh - anyway - as the kids - she waves bye to the kids - um - she starts walking through the house and - and uh - the stove falls off - falls off of her and then, this other thing falls off of her, and then um...and then she walks out the door and the fridge falls off of her. And she just goes walking out back to the woods and it's fall, and all the leaves are falling down and she just goes and sits on a rock, and looks around at all the leaves falling down, so ... I suppose - I don't know, am I

supposed to give you a critique of the philosophy? Well, I would just think that - that she's in the spring of her life and then she goes and she has all these kids and - and eventually, when she comes back out, you know that her life is over. And - it's almost a negative view. Like to me it's kind of negative, like okay, you know, the kids are gone, and you've wasted your whole life and there aren't any flowers on the trees anymore (laugh). Well there you go.

L: Okay.

S15, F, 28,

S: Okay, the story is challenge for change series. It's about working mothers and it starts out, it's in a nicely forested area, and you see petals coming down. Um.. and soon you see a woman walking through picking the petals as if, almost like, you know, children do - he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not. And as she's walking along taking the petals off, the flower turns into the bouquet that she's holding at her wedding day. And you see her at the wedding. And - we see a number of scenes from the wedding, the people at the wedding, and most importantly, we see her throwing the flowers away to all the women at the wedding. And...then very quickly, we are shown her in her kitchen. And there's still lots of flowers around, and she's uh - very slowly and very comfortably preparing food, and a lot of flowers turn into little pictures of food, like on the wallpaper, and things like that. And...so she's -she's preparing food, she's cutting it up, she's taking things in and out of the refrigerator, and at one point she's doing dishes, and as she's doing her dishes, all of a sudden, a little baby pops into the picture. So, she puts her little baby in her carr- or in her little, the little - basket, baby basket. And she goes back and she's cooking and cleaning and, as she's working at the stove, more babies start to appear, and more children start to pop up around. And...the - as she - the pace starts to move quicker, and as she's dealing with more babies, and feeding them and dressing them, she starts to take on the form of the machines in her kitchen. She starts to look like her fridge, she starts to look like her stove - and the children come and just open her up to take the food out of her. And she makes these little boxes of lunches and the kids come and they take these boxes off of her and they go out and get into their school bus and off they go. And . very slowly she starts to walk out, and there's not many pieces of flowers around anymore. And there's not food around. She starts to walk out of the room and she has all these pieces of machinery and as she gets nearer to the door, she starts to drop them off. The fridge drops off, and the stove drops off, and she walks out of the house again as a normal woman and she goes walking back into the forest, only this time, the forest doesn't have the leaves and flowers on it that it did before, it's all very - very bare. Very bare and very naked. And...I think she just - the end of the

story - she just sits there very quietly with all of these bare trees around her. You can see that she's probably aged quite a bit, and it's very sad music at the end. And that's the end of the story.

I.: Hmmm.